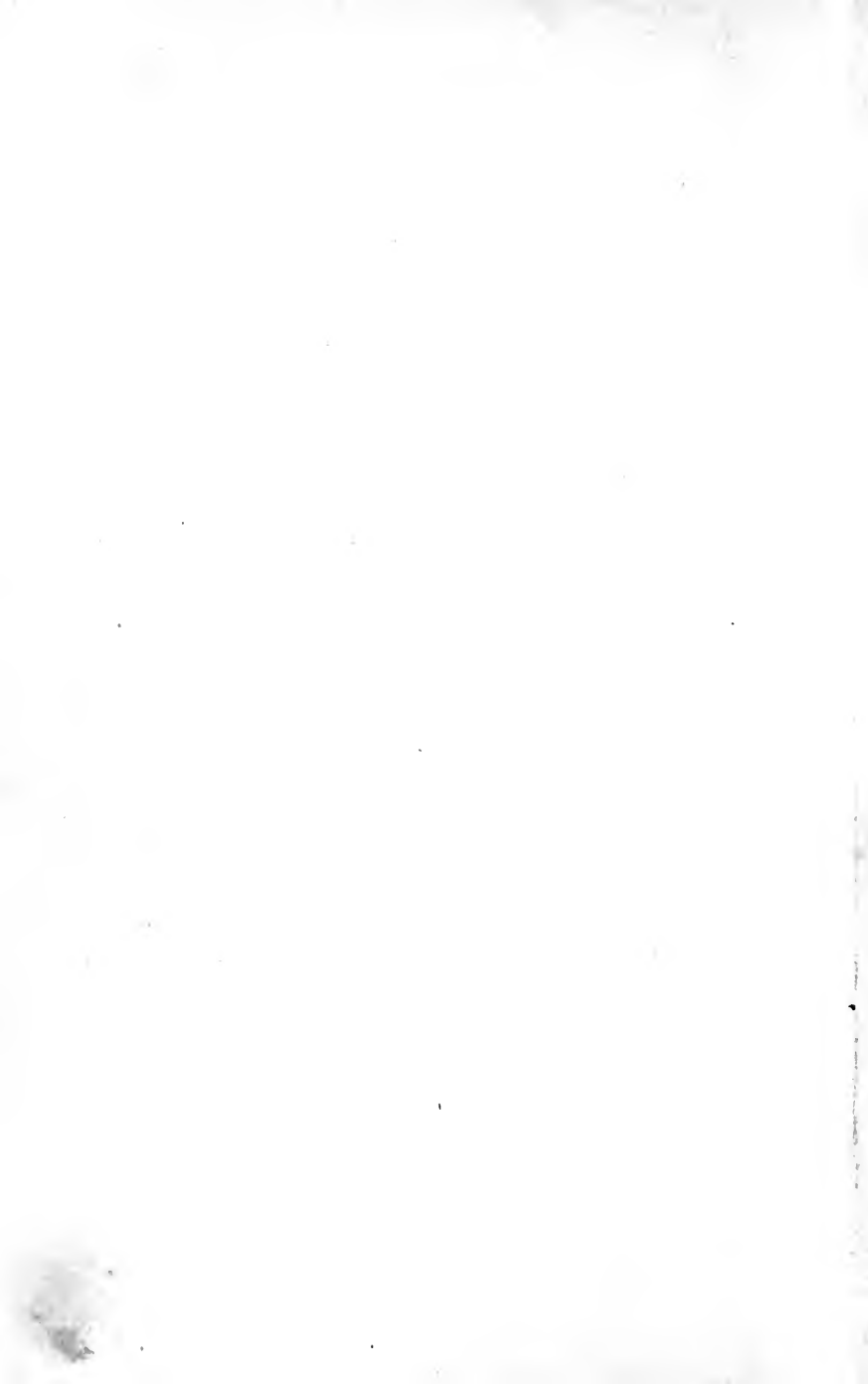


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The Life and Works of
FRIEDRICH HEBBEL

T. M. CAMPBELL, PH.D.



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PREFACE

No apology need be offered for presenting to the English-reading public an account of the life and works of Friedrich Hebbel. The only apology in place is for the errors in fact and judgment that no doubt have been made in the course of the work. Hebbel still remains a much debated writer. Even his enemies concede a certain unique grandeur to his efforts, while his adherents believe that these efforts were, in large measure if not completely, crowned with success. We see him now against the background of a largely discredited philosophy, the systems of Schelling and Hegel. What seems, however, to connect him with those systems is far less important than the original intensity of his own nature. He did not draw his teaching from books. He stands, it is fair to assert, at the beginning of modern dramatic literature. Apparently without direct influence on Ibsen, he none the less anticipated Ibsen. He is the profound and lonely forerunner, more comprehensive and constructive than Ibsen and all who have come after him. The value of the *person* is indeed a leading motive in all his work, but he does equal justice to the power of vital conservatism. The Individual and the Universal—these are the two extremes between which he endeavors at every moment to establish a true relation. To him the very existence of the individual is a never ending problem, and this, together with the search for that upon which the individual can find assured rest, makes up the general elements of his tragedy. The individual has no license for ruthless expansion, while the social order, always the ultimate factor in any crisis, cannot become tyrannical without dissolution and subsequent rebirth. A just estimate of our powers in their relation to the powers above and around us, and the passion for filling our sphere, while resigning what is beyond it—such is the poet's definition of individuality, his conception

of a true education. Only then is the real identity established in man between morality and necessity.

For a new message Hebbel also wished to evolve a new form. On the one hand he desired to fuse the evolution of character with the unexcelled composition of the Greek drama; and on the other, while striving for something like Shakespercan vividness in the main scenes, he intended to accord greater room than Shakespeare to the general forces, or, to use his own expression, to the "divine antagonist." However much we may dispute about the value of this new form, which is explained at some length in the course of our discussion, there is no doubt that it has remained largely Hebbelian. It has found no followers of note, and perhaps it is destined not to. Meanwhile the poet's fame rests securely on the reality of his characters and the depth of his insight into life.

The particular problems debated in Hebbel's plays will be analyzed in the following pages. Among the most striking is that of woman, for Hebbel is a woman's poet. This statement, however, should not convey any suggestion of sentimentality, for no poet was ever further from that than this rough-hewn Schleswig-Holsteiner. The sternest idealism breathes through his tragedies, which make scarcely the slightest concession to popular taste. He is a woman's poet in the sense that he has an almost unerring penetration into the mysteries of her soul, and that he portrays women who are fully conscious of their individual rights over against unjustified demands. But here again the speculative cast of his genius leads him to ultimate relations and not on the paths of propaganda. It is characteristic of his women that they are nearly always superior to his men. From Judith to Kriemhild they are endowed with his penetrating intelligence and his inflexible moral demands in all essentials. Even Nora cannot stand comparison with Mariamne or Rhodope. And as for woman in both weakness and strength, *Mary Magdalene*, which is said to have made a deep impression on Ibsen, is perhaps the most powerful tragedy ever written on that theme.

Hebbel's life, like his writings, was a struggle for expres-

sion. He was an indomitable fighter, and but for that we should never have heard of him. Most men would have succumbed to what he went through with. He risked everything for his art—isolation, poverty, starvation, even the happiness of other people. His struggle measures for us the force of his convictions. His personality is not a lovable one, nor is his life free from the blight of egotism. Egotism indeed—according to his own teaching the pitfall of each individual—nearly became his curse. But he shows the abundant and inflexible energy of genius, he compels our admiration, and his life and his works are full of instruction to those who examine them.

The chief source of Hebbel's biographers is his extensive *Diary*, one of the most remarkable books in all literature. In addition there is a large fund of letters to draw on. His intimate friend, Emil Kuh, in a monumental biography of the poet, also gives much documentary evidence. Hebbel's life, indeed, whether in its sins or its virtues, is recorded with unusual fullness. The following work is based on an independent examination of the chief records, as far as that did not seem superfluous. References to the extensive literature of the subject are made where due in the course of the discussion, or else in the bibliographical appendix.

I wish to express my thanks to Professor O. E. Lessing, of the University of Illinois, for his helpful criticism, and also to Professor H. C. Davidsen, of Cornell, for placing his collection of monographs on Hebbel at my disposal.

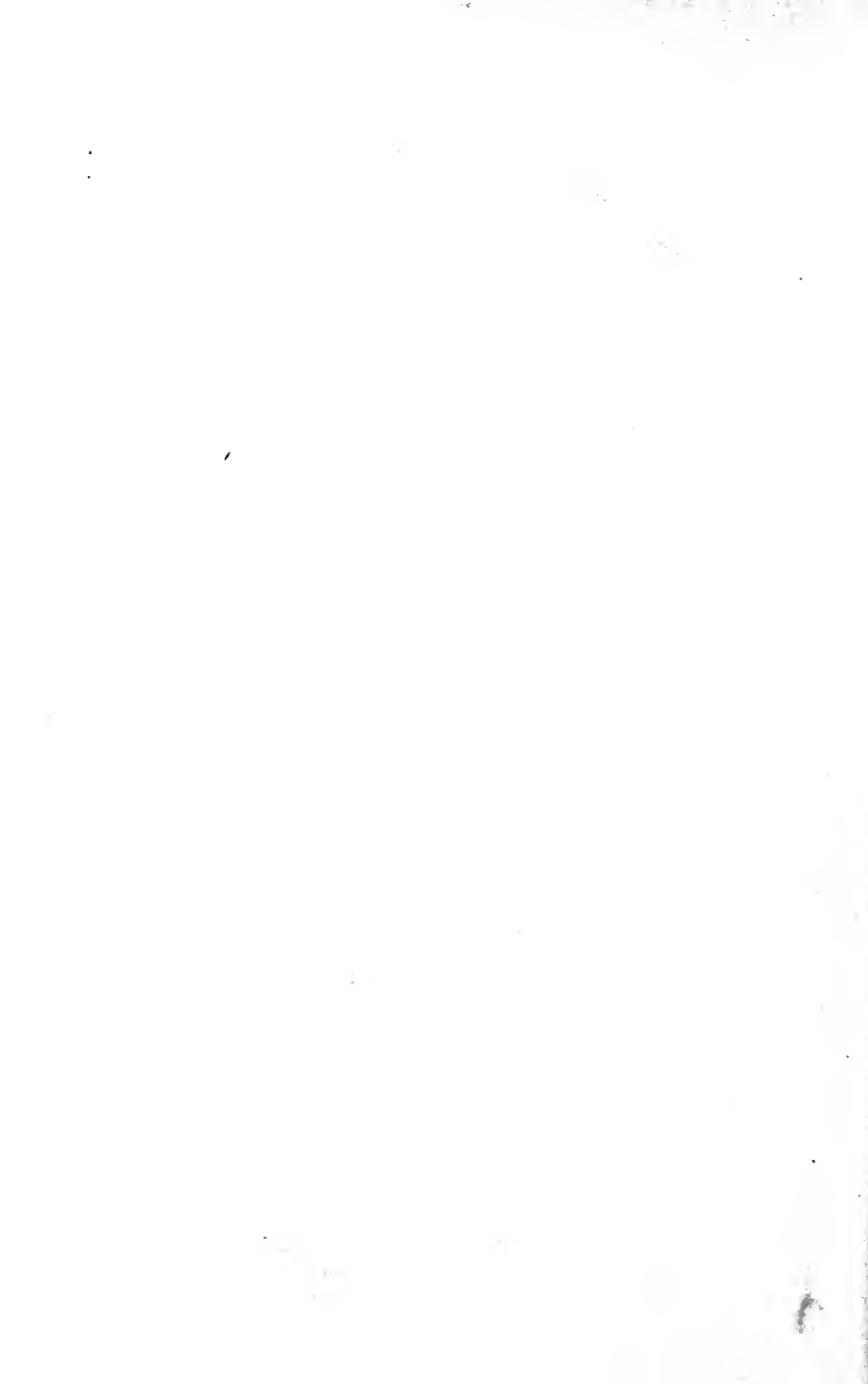
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The Life and Works of Friedrich Hebbel

CHAPTER I

SURROUNDINGS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

FRIEDRICH CHRISTIAN HEBBEL was born March 18, 1813, in Wesselburen in Schleswig-Holstein. This village lies in the heart of the Marsh, that narrow and fertile strip of land which follows the shore of the North Sea. Reaching out eastward toward the rolling country, or the so-called Geest, the Marsh extends in one unbroken stretch of level fields. On the north, west, and south, near enough to be heard in the village when the surf is wild, lies the ocean, held in check by a double line of dikes and the unceasing watchfulness of the people. The landscape of Ditmarsh, the province in which Wesselburen is situated, is one of strange, appealing monotony. On the west the horizon coincides, as far as the eye can reach, with the low line of the dike, and on the east there is always the same level stretch of land—field upon field of waving grain, rich meadows dotted with herds of cattle, prosperous farm-houses, built on slight artificial elevations and surrounded by clusters of trees. The country, ever in the best of cultivation, is drained by long straight ditches, which at the same time serve as boundaries, and narrow paths lead the pedestrian for miles through the lonely fields from one farm or one village to another.

Ditmarsh is a country rich in tradition, historical and imaginative. The famous Niebuhr, one of its sons, declared that he would have written the history of Ditmarsh, if he had not written that of Rome. A certain racial pride is characteristic of its people, and was shared by Hebbel in

due proportion. When he wrote of his life, he was usually at pains to connect himself with his country and its general traits. In a sketch of himself for a French critic, Saint René Taillandier,¹ he emphasized the isolation of his native country from the main stream of civilization; the sacredness of blood revenge; the Draconian laws, condemning to be burned alive the woman who had lost her virtue; the sturdy republicanism of the peasantry, who long resisted the dukes of Holstein, the Danish kings, and even the emperor of Germany, until finally subjected in 1559. Though many of the rude customs he mentions were a thing of the past, the plain institutions and the racial character of the people were still well preserved in Hebbel's time. It was therefore not unnatural that Taillandier, in his essay on the poet for a French audience, should refer to the "semi-barbarous" province of his birth.

The Ditmarsh folk naturally saw the climax of their history in the great Thermopylæan defense at Hemmingstedt, where in the year 1500, five hundred peasants, with the aid of the elements, destroyed a force of thirty thousand Danes who threatened their liberty. The struggle of these people with the ocean also furnished opportunity for heroic deeds that would live in the memory of posterity, while the lonely stretches of land and sea, shadowed by northern mists, gave rise to many a weird story. "The history of Ditmarsh as history," writes Hebbel, "does not really live among the people, and this is scarcely possible, for with the exception of the battle of Hemmingstedt it offers few events and no characters as plain and definite centers about which everything moves. But it lives as legend, as unconnected and often incomprehensible tradition. The child hears in early youth of strong men who withstood kings and princes, he hears of expeditions on sea and land against mighty cities, like Hamburg and Lübeck, and in me at least arose very early by reason of the consciousness of having descended from such men, a feeling of pride resembling that which swells the breast of the young nobleman when

¹ Br. VIII, Aug. 9, 1852.

he thinks of his ancestors. I shuddered with deep horror when I heard accidentally of sacrificial feasts and the blood-stained altar, which—so report said—could still be seen. And all the anxiety, but also all the humility and trust in God of which my heart was capable, awoke, when in the stormy autumn nights I heard my parents or the neighbors describe . . . the terrible storms that so often devastated the land, overthrew the houses, killed man and beast, and rendered the fields unfruitful for a long period of time. I was about eleven years old when such a flood broke over us in the February of 1825.”² The legendary atmosphere of his home and the intimate moods of its natural beauty find slight embodiment in Hebbel’s works. The passive and fragile delicacy of mood was less his affair than the profound and virile discussion of human tragedy. But he was not indifferent to the heroic qualities of the Ditmarsh peasantry, the race of kings, whose unbending will lives directly in some of his verse, and hovers, like a stern genius, over his dramatic production.

Neither of Hebbel’s parents was mentally above the average, nor was brilliance evident in any of their connections, and they shared none of the prosperity of the Ditmarsh peasantry. His father, Claus Friedrich Hebbel, from the neighboring village of Meldorf, was a brick mason, whose wife, Antje Margarethe Schubart of Wesselburen, had brought him a little house and lot as her dowry. Of those first impressions of childhood that become an indelible record in the individual mind, Hebbel has given us an excellent account in an opening chapter of what was to have been his autobiography. This account, entitled *My Childhood*, a model in clearness and precision, extends unfortunately only to his sixth year. The little house, with its three apartments, one occupied by the family, one rented out to Claus Ohl, a mason, and his hunchback wife, the third to a day laborer and his wife, Meta, a huge woman with a Biblically severe face; the long winter evenings, when his father sang hymns, and even worldly songs, or Meta told

² T. II, 2521.

ghost and witch-stories with such vividness that broomstick and chimney took on a new significance; the terrible prophecies of Jeremiah as read by Frau Ohl; the ever friendly Claus, who, even when short of bread and smoking tobacco, sang and whistled for the boys' amusement, who, on Sundays between the sermon and dinner, gave them a sip of his whisky on the sly, and bought them little presents on credit; Claus's two vagabond brothers, who loafed in his rooms all the winter, and told the youngsters impossible lies of their adventures with robbers in deep woods—such were among the unforgettable impressions of his childhood.

In these surroundings was placed a boy of supersensitive imagination, for whom, in the twilight, the beams of the ceiling, the furniture in the room, or even his familiar stick-horse, took on dreadful, fantastic shapes. An ugly tailor was in his eyes a supernatural horror; he dared not look at a bone, and the word "rib" he scratched out of his reading book because of the repulsive images it called up before his inner eye. The sight of an old well with dilapidated covering in a neighbor's yard caused him endless shudderings, dreams tormented him and robbed him of sleep, while a nutcracker opening its jaws in his hands seemed to him a live demon, throwing him into a spasm of fear.

When he was four years old, his school education began. The school, a private affair, was presided over by an old maid named Susanna, tall and masculine, yet with kindly blue eyes. A table full of books occupied the center of the room, and here Susanna sat, smoking a clay pipe and enjoying a cup of tea. She punished with a ruler and rewarded more rarely from a bag of raisins by her side. Considering his four years, the boy learned a good deal in this school. He conceived a violent passion for a little girl, which lasted till his eighteenth year, and he also began to notice the malice in people and the injustice that exists among them. As for book-learning, he was so well instructed in reading that he became the pride of his mother and old Claus, and was allowed to read the evening prayers, which he did with great satisfaction. Because of his youth Susanna would not impart to him her ultimate secret, the art of writing.

But he memorized the Ten Commandments and the Catechism of Luther, who stood without historical distinction in his mind next to Moses and Jesus. Such was his equipment when, in his sixth year, he entered the primary school just established in Wesselburen by the state. Over this new institution presided Franz Christian Dethlefsen, a man to whom Hebbel paid high tribute as influencing his early training, especially in the direction of stylistic correctness.

In his sixth year also another significant change took place in his life, influencing the fortunes of the whole family. His father had gone security on a bad debt and now fell into the hands of a heartless, even malicious creditor, who took away their homestead. Again the boy had an opportunity, dearly bought by experience, to learn the ways of the world. Before this they had been, on however modest a scale, in the landlord class. Some, at least, especially in the boy's little world, looked up to them and respected them, if for no other reason than that they had a productive pear tree in their garden. Now, however, they were eyed askance by the well-to-do, and hailed as equals by the inmates of the poor-house. Then began a period of bleakest poverty, with its rankling, dwarfing bitterness. Hebbel's parents lived in harmony as long as there was enough to eat in the house, which was in the summer, when work was plentiful. But in the winter, employment, and hence bread, was scarce. Then "anxious scenes" often occurred. The father is described as lively and talkative outside of the house, morose and serious inside of it. The mother was kind-hearted and impetuous, a woman with tender blue eyes, who wept easily when excited. Christian Friedrich was her favorite, while the younger Johann was preferred by her husband.

The boys perhaps never suffered actual hunger at home, but their mother often gave them her bread. On the wall hung a picture of an epicure, surfeited at his full table, while a dog sniffed contemptuously at a piece of bread on the floor. "We'll take dinner with that fellow," the father used to say, and the boy declared in after life that he never envied any person as much as he envied that dog. Only at the Christmas season was this gloom lightened for a single day. "How

dreary and desolate my childhood was!" writes Hebbel in his Diary, Sept., 1833. "My father really hated me, and I could not love him. A slave of marriage, bound with iron chains to poverty, to bare necessity, unable, in spite of . . . his utmost exertions to advance a single step, he even hated joy. Its entrance to his heart being shut off by thorns and thistles, he could not endure the sight of it on the face of his children. A merry . . . laugh was a crime in his eyes, mockery of himself. Inclination to play was frivolity . . ., any delicacy about hard labor he considered inborn degeneracy . . . My brother and myself he called his wolves . . ., rarely could we eat a piece of bread without being told that we did not deserve it. And yet my father was a well-meaning man, true and good at heart. If I were not convinced of that, I should never have written this about him. But poverty had taken the place of his soul."

This brief passage, written down in bitterness of spirit, gives a significant view of Hebbel's youth. It was he himself who showed a delicacy about hard labor, and who steadily resisted all efforts to make him take up his father's trade, for which he had no aptitude and no inclination. Here his mother's influence supported him. She sided with her son, insisted that he should attend school regularly, kept his clothes neat by constant patching, and incurred many unpleasant scenes for intervening between him and his father. The poet's own testimony written in his Diary, September, 1838, upon the news of her death, runs in part as follows: "She was a good woman, whose good and less good qualities seemed to me to be woven into my own nature. In common with her I have my high temper, my flaring-up and no less my ability . . . quickly to forget and forgive everything. Though she never understood me, and, considering her education and experience could not understand me, yet she must have had some presentiment of my innermost nature, for it was she who protected me continually against the hostility of my father . . . herself preferring to endure his severity rather than expose me to it."

In school Hebbel was a diligent and ready pupil, and being eager to learn, was soon in advance of the others of

his age and surroundings. Already he showed that tendency to read widely to which he owed the breadth of horizon that, in spite of his unsystematic training, he finally acquired. Dethlefsen supplied him with books. From his sixth to his thirteenth year he was in Dethlefsen's school, and after that he received private instruction from his master. But the period of anything like regular schooling was now at an end, for in his fourteenth year his father died, and he was compelled to look about for employment. The family was in such reduced circumstances that furniture had to be sold in order to cover the burial expenses. And eleven years later, when the poet was in Munich, starving on bread and coffee, his mother was buried on borrowed money, secured by her last few possessions.

There is little doubt that the death of his father removed a serious hindrance between the struggling young genius and that distant goal toward which he was steadily moving, though through devious ways. Thanks to the good offices of Dethlefsen, he now found employment in the house of an official corresponding roughly to the magistrate of a district. This man was named Mohr. He was a person whose income, education, and official standing made it possible for him to lord it over most of his neighbors, and not being a native of Wesselburen, he made full use of his privilege. As an official, he was capable and orderly, in his air and manners he was the conscious aristocrat, and as a human being he was superficial and pedantic. He was destined to become Hebbel's bitterest memory, and later, in one of the most calmly scathing letters ever written, to receive at his hands an unenviable immortality. The conditions on which he received the bricklayer's son into his service were full time for board and clothes. Wash had to be done for him at home. His clothes were to be made from those Mohr had laid aside, and the boy, who had hitherto gone bareheaded, was now able to wear a hat. He was expected to run errands and also to do any copying he was capable of. His ability for this work was noticeable, and he improved so rapidly that he was soon intrusted with more important tasks, such as making extracts from writs of sum-

mons, examining witnesses and taking down preliminary evidence. In this work he learned the orderly habits of his superior, and it must also be added that Mohr gave him access to his library. Finally Hebbel came to do for Mohr the work of a secretary, receiving a small compensation in money.

Grave disadvantages offset these benefits derived from his new position. Chief among them were the impressions of the criminal side of life received in too tender an age by a sensitive nature. They may indeed have furnished him a store of knowledge about human nature, which stood him in good stead in his dramatic work in his later years of isolation, but they could not fail to hasten and deepen his tragic outlook on life. They took away still more of the bright privilege youth should have of enjoying without reflection. Too early for the good of his character or his genius, he saw behind the "painted veil which those who live call Life," and its happy illusions vanished before they had rejoiced his heart. Mohr made no effort to understand his secretary. A reasonable degree of human sympathy from him would have made Hebbel happy. At first the boy regarded him as a kind of superior being, impressed especially by his aristocratic manners. It is said that he imitated Mohr's way of walking and thus acquired a peculiarity which he retained during the rest of his life. But he gained none of that confidence and companionship to which he believed his intellectual qualities entitled him, and gradually his hopes were changed to bitterness. In Mohr's eyes he was and remained the poor laborer's son. He ate with servants and slept with the coachman, even when the coachman was suffering with spotted fever. He had even to repel the suggestion that he marry a girl whom Mohr had compromised. On a person of his nature such treatment necessarily inflicted wounds he could never forget. To this conscious and prolonged humiliation he later attributed his awkwardness and lack of social ease, and it then seemed to him that the discrepancy between his intellectual development and his social status in Mohr's home was the greatest misfortune of his life. At any rate it was one injury he never forgot and never forgave.

But there is already noticeable in him that determination which is among the characteristic features of his life; in spite of all outer discouragements he worked incessantly on his inner development. He had begun early to exercise his talent for writing, but his first poetic awakening he dates from his fourteenth year when hearing his mother read a hymn of Gerhardt. His own early attempts show the influence of the hymn book as well as the popular song. From now on he began to appear in print, chiefly as the author of verse, in the *Ditmarsh and Eiderstedt Messenger*, published in Friedrichstadt. Almost from the beginning he was under Schiller's influence, writing rhetorical poems to various abstractions, such as memory, virtue, freedom, and reveling in italics and exclamation marks. Rivaling these themes in his estimation were others of a gloomy and horrible nature, such as the lament of Cain, or the ghastly punishment of a faithless lover. Among the other poets he had read were Bürger, Heine, Salis Seewis, Matthisson and especially Lessing, whose rhymed epigrams he imitated. Some of Goethe's poetry he must have read also, though without penetrating its mysteries at that time. Besides the evidence of the records themselves, we have his word for it, that Schiller was his first great master. This did not last long, however, for as early as the beginning of 1831 he threw off Schiller's yoke.³ He tells us that this step was brought about by a ballad of Uhland, which he chanced to read, *The Minstrel's Curse*. From this ballad he learned that lyric poetry does not deal with the abstractions nor arise by way of reflection, but is an immediate product of the mind, both in matter and form of expression. At the same time no poet could have been more likely than Uhland to awaken in Hebbel that feeling for terseness of expression which was one of the native virtues of his talent. Uhland's influence is chiefly noticeable in the ballads that Hebbel now wrote. Such a change of style cannot of course be immediately complete, so we find Schiller's imagery continued, and also

³ W. VII, Introduction.

the distichon for the loftier epigrams. This last named form became one of his permanent possessions.

Gradually he was working out an independent style. From the first we are aware, in these attempts at expression, of a very definite and decided personality, of the natural impulse of a strong and peculiar will, not yet conscious of its proper direction. It was in his verse that he first attained artistic independence. A small number of his Wesselburen poems found a place in the final collection of 1857.

He also tried his fortune in other fields. Two insignificant attempts at stories, which appeared in the *Messenger* (1830, 1831, respectively) scarcely deserve mention. *Holion, a Night Scene*, an harassing dream in plain imitation of Ossian and Jean Paul Richter, was one; the other, a succession of horrors entitled the *Fratricide*. Equally unimportant, for their own sakes, were his dramatic efforts. *Mirandola*, an unpublished fragment, composed probably in 1830, is a thoroughly boyish production, remarkable, however, for its combination of bald reflection and unrestrained passion. It shows on every page the influence of Lessing and Schiller. *Mirandola*, the hero, betrayed by his friend, Gomatzina, was to have become a bandit, avenging himself on society in the manner of Carl Moor. This motive of friend betraying friend at the price of great inner torment, is used later in the tragedy of *Genoveva*, in the character of Golo. *Mirandola* breaks off abruptly in the midst of an impossible intrigue. The *Patricide*, a single complete scene (published in 1832), is no better, though quite different in its analytic method and extreme terseness. It is a fate-tragedy full of crowding horrors, and, strangely enough, conceived as accompanied by music. Hebbel's real beginnings in the tragedy, his proper field, were still years in front of him.

A decided improvement in the narrative is the *Painter*, written in 1832. Hebbel is here under the influence of Hoffmann, who, according to his testimony, pointed him to the true source of all writing: life. Both in the characterization and the atmosphere, he strives to reach his model, and is successful chiefly in the first particular. An eccentric old painter is the hero, living alone in an isolated house,

apparently with only a dog for his companion. But at night the singing of a woman is heard there, interrupted by the old man's mocking laughter. It is the voice of his daughter, whom he keeps imprisoned in the house. His wife has been unfaithful to him, he has killed her, and his mind is unbalanced. When his talented pupil, later the famous Raphael, discovers his secret and wishes to marry his daughter, he disappears with her never to be seen again. The central motive is his jealous guardianship of his daughter. Hebbel uses the same situation later in a story, *Barber Zitterlein*, and in a drama, *Julia*.

Both the *Painter* and the *Robber Bride* (1833) were published in a Hamburg fashion journal, to which Hebbel began contributing in 1832. From the point of view of composition, the *Robber Bride* is less effective than the *Painter*. The author switches about from one person to another, until the possibility of concentration is hopelessly sacrificed. As the title suggests, the story is in the sphere of robber romanticism. It contains motives and characters that had appealed strongly to Hebbel's youthful imagination. They appear in his ballads and even in one drama, *Julia*, as late as 1846. Here again in Gustav, who kills the woman he loves because he cannot possess her, and who wants to "earn the hell he receives," we recognize a preliminary study for Golo in *Genoveva*. The problematic side of the material is emphasized both in this unfortunate character and in the peculiar situation, where without knowing it, he pledges his faith to his own deadly enemy. In general this story is also strongly influenced by Hebbel's reading.

Hebbel's companions soon began to see in him a literary light, and turned to him when occasional pieces were in demand. On the whole he seems to have led a gay life with the young people of his age in Wesselburen. He had a number of love affairs: with Emilie Voss, Doris Voss, her sister, to whom he was even engaged; with Wiebke Elwers, who was called his "lady"; with Margareta Carstens and her sister Luise; and also with Hedwig Schulz, who came to Wesselburen with a troupe of actors. In her memory he later wrote one of his best love poems. There is little direct

information about this period of his life. A diary begun in Wesselburen, he unfortunately destroyed. From his letters, however, a somewhat closer view of him may be obtained. Those written to one of his young friends, Hedde, mingle business with verses, epigrams, and deeper problems of all sorts. We see a mind doing its prescribed tasks practically and definitely, yet inevitably turning to more congenial fields. Mohr appears in these letters as the "Prince," a thrust at his assumed superiority. We see the bitterness of genius hampered by circumstances, yet at the same time a strong undertone of youthful hope and confidence. Already he knows that flattery and subservience are the qualities which lead to position and prosperity, that his own self-reliance and talent will arouse opposition, but the life and death struggle with poverty, pessimism, and the persistent inertia of the literary world had to come before his native resolution should be nearly, though never quite, disheartened.

Hebbel early realized that he was not made for idyllic conditions of life. Already his vision was ranging steadily beyond Wesselburen to the great centers of humanity. He thought of becoming an actor, he says he would have joined a band of robbers in order to escape from his narrow sphere. In the winter of 1831-32 he managed a short-lived stage in Wesselburen, where the plays of Körner, among others, were given, and even Shakespeare attempted. He went to Hamburg to consult Lebrun, director of the City Theatre, about becoming an actor, but he received no encouragement. At any rate we find that he soon gave up this plan and began taking Latin lessons from a friend in hopes of getting ready for the universities. A letter to Uhland brought kindly advice to stay where he was, another to Oehlenschläger, the Danish poet, remained unanswered; in fact, never reached its destination. His opportunity was to come in a different way, through the good services of Amalia Schoppe, the editor of a journal of fashion in Hamburg (*Neue Pariser Modeblätter*).

Amalia Schoppe, the wife of a lawyer in Hamburg, was, at the time she began to take an interest in Hebbel, over thirty years of age. She had been unhappily married, had

lost her husband in 1829, and only recently a son. She was a popular and prolific writer, and before her death in America in 1851, she was the author of one hundred and thirty volumes. She edited the *Neue Pariser Modeblätter* from 1827 to 1833, contributed to all kinds of papers, wrote novels, and was a person of considerable information and influence. Like the inexperienced magician who can summon spirits but not control them, she brought Hebbel forth from his seclusion without knowing what to do with him when he arrived. But to her is due the credit for aiding him to advance his next laborious step.

Since 1832 Hebbel had been sending contributions of prose and verse to her paper. In this way, thanks to her fortunate readiness of sympathy, he came into correspondence with her and wrote her of his aspirations. After various plans had been proposed, and what seemed to him the interminable space of two years had passed (1832-34), she reported that some of her friends, impressed by his verses on the battle of Hemmingstedt, would contribute a small sum of money toward his education. He was to come to Hamburg and complete his preparation for the universities. It is noteworthy that Mohr refused to lend any assistance toward this end. He confined himself to a carefully written testimonial. In this he recognizes Hebbel's talent, his industry in his work, his zeal in learning; he declares that he, Mohr, had endeavored to turn the young man's attention especially to history and geography. He mentions Hebbel's literary productions with tolerance, observing that several of them were written in good style and had met the approval of the public. He also testified that Hebbel gave his earnings to support his mother, and expressly declared him deserving of aid in his efforts to secure a higher education. In fact, as a testimonial it was all that Hebbel could have desired.

The letters that Hebbel's benefactress wrote to him in this time of anticipation were well meant, but exasperating in tone. His board was to be furnished him free by his patrons in Hamburg; that is, he was to eat at their tables. He was therefore given detailed instructions in advance as

to his behavior. He was to adopt a purer accent, not to talk much—above all, not to ridicule anything or to criticise Hamburg in any way, and to leave as soon as the meals were concluded. When Hebbel received this counsel, he was a sensitive young man of twenty-one, unusually mature in spite of his meager facilities, and a lyric poet with an individual style. It is easy to imagine his feelings. But he had no choice, so he left Wesselburen for Hamburg, February, 1835.

CHAPTER II

A DESPERATE VENTURE. HAMBURG, HEIDELBERG, AND MUNICH

A CERTAIN pastor Schmalz, of Altona, was the sole trustee of the slender funds to be placed at Hebbel's disposal. To him the poet had to apply for money; he also had to render him a minute account of expenditures. Unfortunately here was another man who could not, or did not, penetrate Hebbel's somewhat difficult nature, and hence accorded him little sympathy. Hebbel's worst fears were realized. His dependence on charity was no less galling than he anticipated. "The way to the free tables was each time an execution of my inner man." "For a meal people expected thanks till Judgment Day." Nor were his patrons satisfied with him. This was inevitable. It was impossible for a mature mind, thronged with plans for creative work, to be satisfied with learning boys' exercises in Greek and Latin forms. He received free instruction from Gravenhorst, a college student, who applied beginners' methods, and Hebbel confessed that the *ille, illa, illud*, inspired him with thoughts of suicide. The language lessons meant for Hebbel soon became lessons in esthetics for Gravenhorst, and it was natural that the poet did not progress rapidly. To make matters all the worse, his relations with Amalia Schoppe were almost completely disrupted through the evil offices of a hypocritical friend, Leopold Alberti.

The most important event in his life during his first Hamburg period was the friendship he formed with Elise Lensing. He made her acquaintance by the chance of occupying a room in the house of her stepfather, Ziese, with whom she was living. At this time Elise Lensing was thirty-one years old, and natural bonds attracted the two to each other. The bitterness of her childhood had even surpassed that of his, and like him she was lonely among her own people. By a chance she had received her education and

social finish in one of the better seminaries of the day. This, as was quite natural, deeply impressed Hebbel, coming, as he did, from lower social environments. In all questions of etiquette she became his authority. But she was far too sensible to wish to extend this authority to matters of the spirit. Sympathy, encouragement, comfort—these qualities the poet found in her for the first time in full measure, and to her humanity he attributed his “spiritual regeneration.” He accounted his association with her as his salvation in Hamburg, where his proud nature necessarily was subjected to many humiliations. In her company he spent his only free and happy hours, and when he left Hamburg his letters to her became his principal correspondence.

In a literary way Hebbel was not inactive during the year he spent in Hamburg. He continued writing lyric poems, some of which were published in the influential *Morgenblatt*, edited by Hermann Hauff in Stuttgart. Hitherto he had published a few stories in the *Ditmarsh Messenger* and in Amalia Schoppe’s paper. Now he wrote what he called his first story, *Barber Zitterlein*, and had it published (October, 1836) in Laube’s *Mitternachtszeitung*. *Zitterlein* is a study of the approach of insanity. The hero, forced by circumstances to give up higher interests and assume the trade of barber, concentrates all his spiritual energy in the love of his wife. Upon her death this love is transferred to his daughter, in whom he sees his wife reincarnated. His conviction of the reality of this reincarnation is a great step toward insanity. When he sees that his daughter loves his apprentice he loses his senses completely. Later he imagines that she is married to the devil, but the sight of her perfectly human child causes him to realize that this notion is insane. He thus discovers his own insanity and asks to be taken to the madhouse. This is the first of Hebbel’s stories to show real independence of style. We are still, however, more than once reminded of Hoffmann, and Werner has shown considerable influence of the now forgotten author, C. W. Contessa.¹ For two other stories

¹ W. VI, p. XVII.

written in Hamburg, *Weiss* (Mr. Haidvogel and his Family) and *Johann* (Paul's Most Remarkable Night), he found no publisher. They appeared many years later (1855) in a collection of his stories, in revised form and under other titles.

Hand in hand with his practice went his theorizing. This is one of his most characteristic qualities. Few writers of such pronounced genius have been equally concerned as Hebbel with understanding themselves. He began a new diary on March 23, 1835, and in this we see him gradually formulating his leading theories of poetry. He had an opportunity to expound them at length in a literary club founded by college students in Hamburg. We have an important paper he read before this company on the dramas of Theodor Körner and Heinrich von Kleist, in which he recognized Kleist as a dramatist of high order and assigned a much lower position to Körner—a valuation now generally accepted, but surprising to his audience. Also from his reviews of other contributions we are enabled to trace the gradual maturing of his esthetic and philosophical ideas. In the latter respect he was tending toward a naive pantheism.

After a year in Hamburg, Hebbel decided to leave that city for the University of Heidelberg. This move was much opposed by some of his patrons, on the grounds, valid enough as far as they went, that his preparation was inadequate. Hebbel's own instincts were truer. He realized that his was an exceptional case, and that he could no longer afford to waste time on formal discipline suited to a different age in life and now lost to him forever. He therefore insisted on his plan. It was in March of 1836 that Hebbel set out for his new destination, making the trip, as was his habit, mainly on foot. Before turning southward, however, he went to Wesselburen to visit his mother for the last time. He was never to see her or his native village again.

From Easter till September of the year 1836, Hebbel was in Heidelberg. Though not allowed to matriculate as a regular student, he was given the right to attend certain

lectures. He heard the famous Thibaut, who took a kindly interest in him, recognized that he was not born to the law, and advised him to discontinue that study. This counsel coincided with Hebbel's own feelings, and in giving up law, he resolved once for all to devote his entire energies to the development of his literary talent. He lived mostly to himself, his chief associate being a young student named Rousseau, who looked up to him as a master. This acquaintance developed into a close friendship, in which Hebbel as the older and more mature was the dominant person, Rousseau being a receptive and willing disciple. Hebbel moulded him easily. He found in him an ardent admirer of Rückert and Schelling, a "young man who sat in judgment on Goethe," but who, at the end of three days, distrusted philosophy, considered Rückert fantastic and Goethe divine. The poet's attitude to philosophy in Heidelberg was evidently a superior one.

Hebbel's isolation had, besides the outward circumstances of his poverty, far deeper causes within him. He found enough problems in his own mind to keep him busy. The vein of his genius was difficult to work, and he was conscious of an imperative mission to bring that treasure to light. With a dogged determination he set himself to the task, and he meant to succeed by his own worth alone, without any of the self-advertising and journalistic methods characteristic of the younger literary leaders, generally known as the Young Germans. For most of them he had little respect, and to their opinions he made no concessions. Though still entirely obscure, he believed firmly that his time would come. To Elise Lensing he wrote, that if God cared for the "sparrows (Gutzkow and Wienbarg)," he need have no fear for himself.

The brief stay in Heidelberg was rich in lyric poetry. Hebbel's verses now flow with a spontaneity that shows his assured mastery of the medium, at least in his best moments. It is striking that even his lyric poems have not solely to do with the phenomenal world, especially with anything incidental or episodic. A chief axiom of his was, that all art must give a concrete symbol of the universal.

Hence we find a number of these Heidelberg poems that might be described as metaphysical, in no bad sense. They show us a mind incessantly playing about the ultimate problem of existence, with a very definite preference for a pantheistic explanation. Their theme is the interrelation and interaction between universal and individual life, and in the poet himself the presence of infinity seems like a burning flame. In the *Night-Song* it is the shuddering question that arises in the heart of the individual grown conscious of its infinitesimal self over against an infinite world. The universal expanse suggested by the sight of the stars, threatens to overwhelm him in its onrush from every side. The lamp of life flickers from these ethereal waves, and he petitions sleep to draw about him "the protecting circle." In *Enlightenment* the source of inspiration is felt to be a flaming-down of the spirit into the individual heart, for that moment an identity between the two, while the poem entitled *Existence* represents the actual unity and interpenetration of all life-forms. These subjects do not spring from reflection in any abstract sense. They are the product of the emotions. They are the best key to their author's soul, which, in its first real expression, is thus revealed to us as possessed of something like a special organ for the emotional realization of the universal. Along with such poems, we find expressions of the poet's despair, the fear that all his efforts will prove to be merely the struggle for an epitaph, verses that he later included in a cycle under the title, *To Pain Its Dues*. Rarely some cheerful and fleeting moment is caught in poetic mood, or the tender recollections of childhood are reflected, as particularly in the masterful *Boy's Sunday*. In this poem, one of Hebbel's best, we are given an intimate view of the deep religious impressions of his first years. Early on Sunday morning the boy goes to the house of God, all alone, hoping to see God there face to face. For is it not His House? But once within the sanctuary he is afraid to open his eyes, and returns home, with resolution to be bolder the next time.

Two stories were written in Heidelberg, though neither was published until nearly twenty years later. The more

important of these was *Anna*, which Hebbel said was the first of his stories to inspire him with respect for his dramatic-epic talent. Just how far the original form varied from the one later published is uncertain, but this version shows considerable influence of Heinrich von Kleist. In his paper on Kleist and Körner before the club in Hamburg, Hebbel had praised especially in Kleist's narrative art the logical development of terrible events from an insignificant beginning. He had in mind the story of *Michael Kohlhaas*, where the starting point is the theft of two horses from Kohlhaas by a nobleman. The peasant insists on his rights, being met each time by a new wrong, and meeting this in turn with renewed defiance. He loses all he holds dear, property and family, but persists until a rebellion is back of him. The entire social and legal injustice of the age is uncovered as the story proceeds. Hebbel pursues the same inflexible course in *Anna*, though here the story is only a few pages in length. From the brutal treatment accorded her by her master, to the catastrophe that destroys castle, village, and herself, events move with a swift, inexorable force. The matter-of-fact, chronicle style of the narrative, suppressing all personal sympathy or any other emotion on the author's part, the violent passions of the characters, with their terse, abrupt, impetuous expression—all this reminds us of Kleist. From a later reference in his Munich letters, we know that Hebbel especially admired the dramatic intensity of that author's stories, and here we find him clearly striving to attain the same quality. And it must be admitted that he does attain it—only too well. He fails to give the reader any contrasting moments of repose, as does Kleist in his briefest and most terrible stories, so that we are overwhelmed by the onrush of events.²

Hebbel's efforts while in Heidelberg to find publishers were unavailing. Gutzkow could not use the *Anna* for the *Grenzboten*. The publishers refused a collection of stories, and from the *Morgenblatt* he had no reply to his contribu-

² See Kleist and Hebbel. A Comparative Study. The Novels. Dissertation (Chicago) by Henrietta K. Becker, 1904.

tions. They never reached their destination, as he later discovered, and the same fate overtook his letter to Uhland asking permission to dedicate to him a collection of poems—for which no publisher had been found.

In Heidelberg Hebbel seems to have made a beginning of his efforts to understand painting. He visited the museum with his friend, Rousseau, and recorded, with customary frankness, in his *Diary*, that he could do nothing but stare around like Reuben in the city. He could say nothing but empty phrases. His relation to the plastic arts was never particularly vital, even after he had become acquainted with their finest examples. But it may well be that his decision to leave Heidelberg for Munich was to some extent influenced by the reputation of that city as an art center. Also he had been told that the cost of living was lower in Munich, and he says himself that he hoped to discover new ground there in journalism. On September 12, 1836, therefore, he set out for the Bavarian capital. He was on foot, accompanied by Rendtorf, a student whom he had met in Hamburg.

Without financial aid from Elise Lensing, Hebbel would not have been able to make this new venture. He received the money with reluctance, hoping soon to return it. Passing through Stuttgart, he visited Hauff, editor of the *Morgenblatt*, and brother of the famous novelist. He also paid his respects to the poet Gustav Schwab, who gave him a letter to Uhland. Schwab complimented his poems—"a matter of indifference to me," says Hebbel, "as I need no external test of my poems." Schwab also urged him to work up the history of his native Ditmarsh for literary purposes, a plan he had already considered, and one that occupied him for some time afterward. A visit to Uhland in Tübingen proved disappointing in the extreme. Next to Goethe, Hebbel honored Uhland most among German poets, but he found a man whose personal appearance and impression were insignificant. He declared that Uhland conversed on the simplest topics with inconceivable difficulty. From this experience he drew a characteristic resolution: never to approach any other human being with a feeling of diffidence.

Hebbel reached Munich on September 29, 1836, and his first letter to Elise Lensing, dated the following day, he signs: "No longer law student, but man of letters." The year 1837 he begins with a prayer and a summary. His prayer is that the new year may bring him a great subject as a fit medium of expression for the wealth of inner life fermenting within and threatening his destruction. In his summary he records that he has won little in the way of position and knowledge, but a higher insight into his own nature, a better view of the world and life, a deeper conception of art and a firmer grasp on the mysteries of style. And also, probably through Goethe's influence, a nearer approach to nature. The writers that have exercised the greatest influence over him, he mentions in order: Goethe, Börne, and Jean Paul Richter. And finally he adds: "I have also made a little, a very little progress in the art of considering myself a human being when in the presence of others—an art that I lost in my painful and disgraceful relations in Ditmarsh."

The Munich period of his life, somewhat more than two years and a half, was one of bitterness and desperate combat. The whole story lies open before us in the letters to Elise Lensing. While he was compelled, by virtue of his own nature, to struggle for inner light and artistic power, he was condemned by circumstances to the severest isolation and poverty. His few visits to the house of Rousseau's elegant relations could only emphasize the distance that really separated him from such association. Very soon, too, he discovered that he could earn practically nothing with his pen. What he had to offer might compel recognition in the future, but it would not fill his purse in the present. As for hack work, he resolved not to do that if he could, but frankly added, that he could not if he would. And this was literally true. Few men have been less suited to such activity than Hebbel. It has been said that he earned enough money in Munich to sole his shoes. And it is pathetic to read his *Diary* entrance for June 27, 1837, that he has received his first money from Cotta's *Morgenblatt* (Stuttgart) for correspondence and poems. "The golden side of poetry," he adds! The amount was enough to pay

his expenses for somewhat over a month, but his expenses were exceedingly modest. From an account of his, October, 1837, we see that he lived for about twenty gulden a month. His room, furnished, cost him six gulden. More than half of the money he mentions came from Elise. The correspondence he sent to Stuttgart, consisting of five or six articles, from October, 1836, to April, 1838, is not particularly good. The writer is more interesting than his communications. The latter have nothing of the garrulous grace and wit, so characteristic, for example, of Heine, and Hebbel realized that a man who could visit neither theater nor concert, nor even frequent the restaurants, was in no position for such efforts. Hebbel was too busy with himself, his genius ran too much to the depths for good journalism. His description of the devastating plague of cholera (Feb., 1837), which he fortunately escaped, is disappointing in the extreme. When he does get an exceptional look into the theater, however, he writes interestingly.

As far as literary production goes, these years were still years of preparation, broadly considered. Hebbel's dramas were all merely hovering about the fringes of his mind. The numerous plans, an Alexander, a Napoleon, a Luther, and especially, a Joan of Arc, remained unexecuted. His actual efforts were devoted to finding an independent style in the narrative, as he had done in the lyric. These efforts were doomed in the main to failure. The work that occupied most of his attention was a humorous study, entitled *Schnock*, in the manner of Jean Paul Richter. As far as the formal side of their talents is concerned, two more dissimilar writers could hardly be found: Jean Paul, with his diffuse, capricious abundance; and Hebbel with his need for the highest precision. Though not without a critical eye for the vagueness of many of Jean Paul's characters, especially the women, he read him with enthusiasm at that time. What attracted him in Jean Paul was the originality and grandeur of conception, the depth of humor, as embodied in those philosophic, half-mad characters, the Leibgebers and the Schoppes, unique and talented fools, such as no other writer ever produced. It was the study of character conceived in

its central point and developed from that, which appealed to Hebbel.

In this sense we find him working on *Schnock*, a name itself reminding us of Jean Paul. And he tells us that he was directly inspired by that author's *Attila Schmelzle*. Hebbel had begun *Schnock* in Hamburg. In Munich he rewrote it several times, hoping to find a publisher. It was his desire to make the humor not accidental, but an organic part of the character. He wanted to get inside his hero's soul and see how the world looked from that point of view. *Attila Schmelzle* is one of Jean Paul's most delightful works. In the first place, it is brief, and in the second place, the hero is admirably characterized by Jean Paul's pleasant garrulousness, which in most of his works is tiresome. Schmelzle is an army chaplain, who is valorous—in his own opinion—but at the same time exceedingly cautious and prudent. His maxim is, that "a good retreat is reckoned a masterpiece in the art of war; and at no time can a retreat be executed with such order, force, and security, as just before the battle, when you are not yet beaten."³ In his first battle he acts on this excellent principle, but unfortunately the enemy is beaten, and there is no chaplain to give thanks for the victory. Schmelzle repudiates the notion that he is afraid. When he sits on a chair in the middle of the room during a thunder storm, after removing all keys, money, and other conductors, from his pocket, or when he ties himself to his wife at night, to keep from walking in his sleep—which he had never done—he is merely taking the necessary precautions.

Schnock is also a study in timidity. The hero is a joiner, with the physique of a Hercules and the courage of a mouse. He would have been much happier, had he been a foot shorter. It is only when Schnock is drunk, and safe, that he has the courage to doubt his own timidity. His wife married him because he was not man enough to say no, and she has him mercilessly henpecked as soon as she discovers

³ Carlyle's German Romance, Vol. II.

his fear of her. The climax of the story is *Schnock's* visit to the menagerie, where, with lions on one side, tigers on the other, a boa constrictor in reaching distance, and a cage of rattlesnakes over his head, he suffers agony until he makes a wild dash for safety—only to regret that he had not seen the bears for his money! How he takes the pastor to task for a personal sermon, how he punishes an impudent cousin, how he attempts to circumvent his wife's stinginess by stealing his own sausages—these and other episodes are told with great vividness and effect. There is none of Jean Paul's rambling digression. The lines are perhaps too sharp and clear, the language too direct and definite. There is also a certain bitterness in Schnock's reminiscences, far removed from the irrepressible optimism of Schmelzle. This was, no doubt, induced by Hebbel's own harsh experiences, and in a sense the reflection of his futile efforts to solve the problems of existence. As an attempt to portray life, this little novel, or rather sketch, was a sort of *reductio ad absurdum*. How differently from Jean Paul does Hebbel regard those narrow, restricted conditions of the middle classes! Not with the eye of patience and love, to discover the finer human emotions hidden beneath the thousand follies and pedantries of life, but with the satirist's keen vision, to lay bare its pettiness, its utter insignificance. This little work, long its author's main hope, was not published until 1848, and then in greatly reduced form.

Several other prose works were undertaken in Munich. Two of these, *An Evening in Strassburg*, an unsuccessful description of an episode on his trip from Heidelberg to Munich, and the *Obermedicinalrätin*, a story told with Strindbergian malice, were published in Laube's *Mitternachtszeitung*, without remuneration. Another, *Nepomuk Schlägel on the Hunt for Joy*, was to portray a professional pessimist. This remained a fragment—not unfortunately—and was published in the collection of his stories in 1855. Fragmentary also is the much more promising work entitled *The Two Vagabonds*. This is a genuinely romantic effort, practically free from the bitterness noticeable in the other Munich stories, brighter and more humorous in tone. We

do not, it is true, know to what end Hanns and Jürgen, the two genial vagabonds and swindlers, would have come, but we cannot withhold our sympathies from them entirely. We take leave of them at an interesting moment, when, thanks to the all-persuasive tongue of Jürgen, they have come to a decent lodging and new clothes by imposing on the credulity of Master Jacob, a well-to-do blacksmith. For Jürgen is just on the point of discovering how to make gold, and Master Jacob sets him up in a "laboratory," where he, if not they, may confidently expect the settlement of all material cares.

The *Ruby* was a symbolical fairy-tale, which Hebbel later cast in dramatic form, and which may be best considered in that connection. Most of these Munich stories are good, but none of them great. While he quickly attained independence as a lyric poet, and somewhat later founded a new type of drama, in the narrative he was continually seeking, without finding, the exact form he needed. His talent, he complained, was "adjusted to the greatest precision," and in a letter of February 19, 1837, he hinted that conception interested him more than execution. This really meant that he had not yet discovered the proper medium of expression, a fact that he freely confessed a few years later (1840), when the completion of his first great drama, *Judith*, in a measure consoled him for his earlier failures. He lacked entirely the pleasant talent with which, in English Literature, the name of Jane Austen is synonymous. "I never get into the swing," he says, "everything seems to me so unimportant, so superfluous. I demand that some significance shall attach to every trait, and with such demands the pages are not filled. Alas, if I were only released from the bonds of literature! It is a useless existence, the only choice being between deepest humiliation and starvation."

During these years in Munich, his theory of lyric poetry gained in definiteness. He abstracted it from Schiller, negatively, and positively from Uhland, Goethe, and, as a matter of course, from himself. First of all we notice his high conception of poetry, which, in his sight, is removed from the transgressions of the verse-maker, as far as the

east is from the west. "All poetry is revelation . . . The hour of inspiration is not the meager, hothouse product of exterior impressions; it brings the genius the key to the Universe and he can enter where he will." Every poem must have an idea, but not a general idea. "Idea" for him means a definite condition of what he termed *Gemüt*, variously rendered by mind, soul, heart, feelings. In his own words (February 24, 1839): "The function of lyric poetry is to unlock the depths of the human soul, liberate its most obscure feelings by means of heavenly melodies, and intoxicate and enliven it through itself," or, as elsewhere expressed, "to put the heart in possession of its noblest, most beautiful and elevating emotions."

He continued steadily producing lyric poems during these years, some of them ballads, in which he shows a fondness for striking turns and unexpected situations, chiefly tragic; many of them efforts to banish his pessimism by expressing it; others, again, the formulation of his mystic sense of the omnipresent divinity. Those dealing with the recollections of childhood are unusually good, and one of his very best is the reminiscence of an early love. In this poem, *To Hedwig*, Hebbel exhibits strong emotion chastened by the beauty and tenderness of an idealized memory. Here he commemorates the "joy that did not intoxicate, and the pain that left no sting." The form is elastic and sincere, the emotions, thoroughly unique, are analyzed with subtlety and precision but not in detail.

By May, 1837, he speaks of having seventy poems he would like to publish in a collection, and in November of that year he got together one hundred and thirteen, which he sent to Uhland with the request for aid in finding a publisher. About twelve weeks later Uhland replied. Of the poems he spoke favorably, indicating those he especially liked, and said that he had turned the manuscript over to Cotta, his own publisher, for consideration. Uhland signed this letter with the words "friendly esteem," and Hebbel's satisfaction over the esteem of his honored master was unbounded. He thought this a good deal, coming from a poet whose name would surely be immortal! It is true, Cotta, having

suffered loss by fire, and for other reasons, could not publish his poems, but Uhland's recommendation secured, at least, an honorable refusal. Hebbel, infused with new hope, immediately sent the collection to Campe, in Hamburg, stipulating ten louis d'or as compensation. By Campe the poems were referred to Carl Gutzkow for an opinion, which, as far as it concerned their merit, was highly favorable. Yet Campe was advised not to publish them as a collection, as their success in that form should be doubtful. Rather should he wait until they had been tried out in the *Telegraph*, which Gutzkow was editing, and in other literary journals. It now lay in Hebbel's power to form an alliance with Gutzkow, who, in his letter to Campe, came more than half way. But, in spite of his isolation, Hebbel was not inclined to meet this advance.

During these years of his preparation, which we have been reviewing, a literary revolution was under way in Germany. An outlived and reactionary romanticism was being replaced by a realistic movement, the leaders of which were called the Young Germans. Chief among them were Heinrich Laube and Carl Gutzkow. The general program of this movement, a series of lectures at the University of Kiel by Ludolf Wienbarg, had been published by him under the title of *Esthetic Campaigns*. The book was dedicated to Young Germany, meaning the younger generation. It was Adolf Menzel, who in his denunciation of Gutzkow's so-called novel, *Wally, the Doubter* (1835), first included certain young authors under that heading as a "school." And when, upon Menzel's denunciation, the Frankfurt Parliament issued its edict forbidding the writings, present and future, of Young Germany, it expressly named Heine, Laube, Gutzkow, Wienbarg, and Mundt. Thus an outward solidarity was given to the movement. Heine had little to do with it. The general radicalism of his writings, his keen invectives against all forms of medievalism, made it safer for him to remain in Paris, where he had gone after the revolution of 1830. The others endured various persecutions, even to the extent of prison sentences for Laube and Gutzkow, before the ban of official disapproval was lifted.

Gutzkow remained a resolute liberal to the last, while Laube grew rapidly conservative.

These men formed the literary powers when Hebbel began to break into print. Therefore a brief summary of their purposes is now in place. They stood for a definite reform of literature. They meant to bring it back to the world of reality again, from which the efforts of the Romantic School had effectually banished it. Infused with revolutionary ideas from France, they set out to place literature in the service of a new national and political ideal, just as Romanticism had placed it in the service of reaction in church and state. They were opposed to all vague idealism, the flight from life, advocating in its stead a direct attack on contemporary problems. Their attitude to certain conventions was summed up in the unfortunate phrase "emancipation of the flesh." In his *Wally*, Gutzkow, with much moralizing and little art, combatted the principle of revelation, and pointed man back to his own powers. The Young Germans stood also for greater liberties for the Jews and the emancipation of woman. In their opinion, not only the Romantic school, even Goethe was out of date, especially in the sense that he had held his art aloof from political or social programs. They had no gods, they were thoroughly rationalistic. In their hands literature was to be chiefly a program. By its aid they intended to effect political, religious, and social reforms. They had great ambitions, and many laudable ones, but the outcome showed that they were unequal to the task they imposed upon themselves. Wienbarg and Mundt made little pretension to poetic power, while neither Gutzkow nor Laube, whatever their merits in other directions may have been, possessed it. They were, therefore, unable to give permanent artistic expression to their time, and the more desperately they attempted, in novels, dramas, and especially sketches of all kinds, to catch every changing mood, the more elusive did their goal become. They were talented doctrinaires. Creative art was not their sphere.

Both against these views and their representatives, Hebbel had many things to object, and from the very first an im-

passable barrier was raised between them and him. To begin with, he did not believe in their main proposition, that any reforms would be brought about by literature, and while he did believe that there must be a very intimate connection between the poetic work and its times, his conception of that connection was infinitely deeper and more essential than anything the Young Germans could say on the subject. We shall have occasion to define it in discussing his theory of the drama. They were essentially journalistic talents, while Hebbel came to regard journalism as the chief national sin. They knew how to further their own reputation, he was a genius, condemned to life-long isolation. They were radicals, he was an evolutionist, a conservative among radicals, and a radical among conservatives. Their ideas on the emancipation of women were among his chief aversions, though he has of right been named the modern *Frauenlob*. But they aimed at conventions, while his thoughts went much deeper. And also, from his standpoint, the self-assurance and pretension with which they came before the public were entirely out of proportion to the poetic value of their achievements. He stood above them and had a right to judge. And that he made free use of his right is plain enough from his *Diary*. What difference did it make to him that Gutzkow praised his poems? He praised the wrong things in them. And we know that, at this very time, Hebbel was planning a book of contemporary criticism, in which he meant to have a thorough reckoning with the Young Germans, especially "the arrogant Laube," as he expressed it.

While Hebbel was struggling along under the greatest adversities in Hamburg, entirely isolated and unknown, he contemptuously referred to these young men, whose reputations were already firmly established, as "sparrows." Gutzkow was already coming into his place as the most influential critic in Germany for a long time to come, while Laube was destined to be director of the best German stage, at a time and place in which Hebbel needed his good will most. Nor was our young poet, in the strength of an inflexible literary sincerity, inclined to judge his other contemporaries with

leniency. The living poets whom he most venerated, Tieck and Uhland, belonged to the past. Halm, with his *Griseldis* and his "fine language" in imitation of Schiller, he regarded as beneath his notice. "Wherever one looks in German literature," he exclaims (1838), "it is all rubbish." At this time he seems to have had no knowledge of the real poets among his contemporaries, such as Mörike and Grillparzer. Naturally enough, therefore, Hebbel would have to fight desperately for his existence, for the literary world cannot be expected to recognize merit in a writer who despises it.

But for the present, the greater battle was within himself. Doubt of his mission tormented him. Realizing that art was his only avenue of approach to the best and highest in life, he was confronted with the terrible thought, that his own talent might fall short of great art. No poets, he exclaims, should be born, who are not Goethes. Other problems also left him no peace. These letters from Munich show us more than a poet struggling for mastery and recognition, they show us a man battling against pessimism and despair for a workable philosophy of life. His very isolation lends a grandeur to his efforts. Rousseau, who had followed him to Munich, was his only intimate friend. His only other audience, long the recipient of his profoundest thoughts, was a Hamburg seamstress. With amazing frankness he invites Elise Lensing to look with him into the seething depths of his spirit, he overwhelms her with passionate outbursts on the theme that all is vanity. This deep insight into the "nothingness of all existence and activity," just as it had destroyed in advance the hopeful audacity of his youth, now threatened to thwart the settled purpose of his manhood. It seemed to him that, in making man, Nature had gone beyond her powers. This may relieve the individual of guilt for his degeneracy, but since the individual is supported only by a sense of the value of human life, this thought empties his existence of its main content. Hebbel pursues these reflections until he is touched with a sense of responsibility for all the evil men do. Modern life seems to him to have lost every great faith. He even questions the advantage of having overcome medieval supersti-

tions—it is a great loss, for example, that we no longer believe in the devil. “Whether men will or not, they will soon have to set up another golden calf.” This is a bitter formulation of the same issue he expressed more seriously in his searchings for a new God-idea. It is evident that he had faced every illusion. When Elise replies that his pessimism is a disease, he defends it as the source of all higher life. For most people, he says, religion is a spiritual sleep, or even a failure to awake. As for himself, he is convinced that the only worthy relation of man to God, and the only one God desires, is as complete independence of him as possible. This is the same idea as that expressed in the poem of advice, *To Young Men* (Hamburg, 1839). He formulates his conception of religion, at this time, accordingly: “There is no way to God save by man’s activity. Every man is related to the Infinite by the best strength, the chief talent that has been given him, and only as far as he trains this talent and develops this strength, does he approach his Creator and enter into relation with him. All other religion is empty and vain.” Logically, therefore, he rejects the Christian dogmas of sin, humility, and grace. In these Munich years a particular bitterness against Christianity is shown in his letters, especially against its ethical teachings. This abruptness he modified in maturer years, though he never approached dogmatic Christianity.

Hebbel’s studies in the University of Munich were extensive but irregular. He read largely history and philosophy. He was not among the poets who suppose that inspiration can dispense with all information. On the contrary, he continually lamented his desultory education, and used every means within his reach to supplement it. The most famous men he heard were Görres and Schelling. The former was too cabalistic for Hebbel’s taste, while the theological Schelling of Munich impressed him less, perhaps, than the earlier writings of the same philosopher. It was in Munich that, through Schelling, and in the works of Solger and Hegel, he first became better acquainted with the great philosophy of his time. The relation between this and his own thoughts on the theory of the drama will be explained in

the discussion of that subject. Besides other works of Hegel, he probably read the *History of Philosophy*, and he evidently read history from an evolutionary point of view.

Especially interesting to him were the lectures on criminology by Mittermaier. The problem of the criminal had a certain fascination for him throughout his entire life. His interest might be termed a purely professional one, in his earnest effort to fathom the depths of human nature. Especially as a dramatist was he concerned with the ideas of sin and atonement, or of guilt and reconciliation. Mittermaier advocated, it is true, a more lenient interpretation of personal guilt, but without ignoring for practical purposes the ideas of free will and strict accountability. We have already seen to what despair Hebbel's thought on this question reduced him at times. For him it contained the central problem of life; yes, it reduced life itself to one enormous, insistent problem, which would not leave him in peace. His total dramatic production may be regarded as the expression of his struggle with it.

In view of subsequent developments in the relation between Hebbel and Elise Lensing, one of the most important in his life, it is well to mention such personal aspects of that as are reflected in the letters from Munich. Though Elise's letters, presumably, are lost, it can be inferred from Hebbel's replies that she occasionally touched upon the question of their marriage. Hebbel's answer is frank and uniform when he approaches this subject. Marriage, at that time, was in his view a necessary civil institution, but it was not for him and his kind. He did not think he was made for marriage. He reminds Elise, that she already shares his innermost life as fully as is possible between two persons. To no one does he write as to her, and a more intimate spiritual association would be inconceivable. It should be to both a matter of satisfaction that the "intoxication of the senses" had passed into a more settled and mature relation. And when he tells her that a heart should be capacious enough for many friends, or even many loves, it is a definite warning not to reckon on possessing him alone—a warning not without real foundation in his Munich ex-

periences, as we know. His relations with Josepha Schwarz, a cabinet-maker's daughter, were of the most intimate character. None the less, his letters are full of such passages as these, the sincerity of which it is useless to doubt: "The holiest and truest in me, whatever there is of honor and love, is turned to you, is yours forever. . . . I think of you always when I am most worthy of myself, and . . . the most desirable thing I expect from the future, is to live with you again." (Jan. 1, 1837.)

Before leaving Munich Hebbel received the news of his mother's death. (September, 1838.) It had been his cherished desire to help her, but she had passed away during his own darkest days. "Now, I can believe in my own death," he says. What he had not done, Elise Lensing, with characteristic thoughtfulness, had done in his stead. Without his knowledge, but in his name, she had sent his mother supplies and money. Another severe shock to him came in the death of his friend, Rousseau, who died at his home in Anspach, just after having attained his doctorate. In his first grief Hebbel reproached himself with having been a tyrannical friend, as he certainly was both then and later. But immediately he adds a characteristic justification: "It is not a sin, it is a condition of life, that man use his powers. Strength against strength! In God is the reconciliation."

In March, 1839, Hebbel set out on foot for Hamburg, accompanied only by his little dog, for whose welfare during the rough journey he showed more concern than for his own. He had a lingering regard for the place he was leaving, and little hope of sympathy in that for which he was bound. With the exception of Elise Lensing no one attracted him there. He was conscious of a certain false relation between himself and those who had acted in his behalf. They had given, to be used in their sense, what he could use only in his. As he turned northward again he was firmly resolved to receive no aid and no suggestions unless they were offered in full accord with his plan of life. On his way he passed through Göttingen, stopping there to see Ihering, a student whom he had known superficially in Heidelberg. Ihering's

account of this visit is instructive.⁴ Hebbel was sorely reduced. He was as dusty as a beggar, his shoes were entirely worn out, his clothes threadbare. Ihering confesses that he was ashamed to be seen in the company of his visitor, who was regarded in town as a sort of curiosity. He had Hebbel's shoes soled and provided him with money for the rest of his trip. According to his account Hebbel received these benefits as if they were a favor conferred on the benefactor, treating his host throughout with the mild condescension of a superior being. "He spoke to me like a professor from his chair," says Ihering. He suffered no questions and no interruptions, and when thanked for the instruction, which was no doubt excellent, Hebbel replied, that he had not spoken as much for his host's sake as in order to gain a clear expression of his thoughts. With good humor Ihering offers explanations for this inconsiderate conduct on Hebbel's part, but the facts as they stand are so characteristic of the poet's personality, in one of its phases, that they may pass here without comment.

From Göttingen he made his way in cold, rough weather, with great suffering and danger to his health, to Harburg, where Elise Lensing met him. They went to Hamburg on the following day.

⁴ Kuh, I, p. 259 f.

CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNING OF FAME: *Judith*

ON the evening of April 11th, Hebbel wrote the following words in his *Diary*: "Now I am sitting again in the same room in which I sat three years ago and learned vocabularies by heart. . . . My prospects are very different from what they were then. . . . The secretary, scarcely out of his chrysalis, who considered it a great honor to be made a member of a college boys' club, is now sought out and respected by the foremost literary lights of Germany. A world of activity stretches out before me. Three years make a vast difference. What was still merely imaginary in Munich is now assured: I am no longer embarrassed, no matter whose presence I may be in. . . . Doctor Wihl has urged me to write a history and criticism of German lyric poetry. This coincides with a plan already formed in Munich, and I will do it. I can say more on this subject than any one else. Gutzkow wants an account of Munich for his *Telegraph*, and for his *Yearbook* my reviews of Heinrich Laube. Campe wants an historical novel with its scene in Ditmarsh. Work enough. I can complain no longer. The gate is open for me."

But Hebbel was a man of moods, and this bright sky was immediately overcast. The very next morning he says: "I have already written a few pages on Munich. Such gossip disgusts me." And the month had not passed before he began to have serious doubts as to his new literary connections. "In all these people there is no truth, hence they believe in none themselves. I cannot stand them." This had special reference to Gutzkow. He retracts this in his *Diary* a few months later, only at once to reaffirm it. We can easily see that their relation was not cordial, and every effort to make it so, whether now or in after years, was doomed to failure. There could be no genuine alliance between the versatile talent and the profound and passionate

genius, except on the basis of subordination, which Gutzkow would have been the last to concede.

None the less, Hebbel contributed a number of articles to the *Telegraph* as he had planned. These appeared between 1839 and 1841. Some were descriptions of his experiences in Munich, characterizing the city, its people, its architecture, its drama, and its art. They are freer in tone than those he had sent to Stuttgart earlier, and, in contrast to them, make rather enjoyable reading. Everywhere is noticeable the tendency that he never denied, whether in theory or practice, to find leading principles for his remarks. He hated mere disconnected talk. He contributed more than twenty-five reviews, dealing, for the most part, with now forgotten books. In his criticism he does not go into detail, seldom gives a concrete analysis of the work in question, but looks at once for the chief structural principle of the work. His criticism of entire books, or for that matter of all the works of an author, as for example those of Byron some years later, is very brief, especially considering its range and depth.

As Werner has pointed out, these reviews for the *Telegraph* are not free from the journalistic mannerisms of the day, the superior tone and the self-assured air. They never deny, however, the real earnestness of their author's purpose, which his later essays reveal in greater naturalness and simplicity. The review of a work on Socrates is particularly interesting, in so far as the question of Socrates' guilt or innocence is discussed. Socrates, it is said, stood over against his time with the bright sword of a new philosophy, and his time, stronger than he, disarmed him and slew him with his own weapon. This was a "deed of blind passion," it is true, but it was "adopted by fate." From a higher point of view it was justified. Socrates, not the "eternal Idea of Justice," perished. Hebbel does not carry out this explanation further, which indicates his belief in something like the pragmatic sanction of history. On the other hand, there is noticeable in the same essay a radical position with reference to the writing of history. It is not the business of the historian, he thinks, to "settle" questions. We do not

need a fixed past. "We do not want to inherit anything—inheritanes make one lazy. We want to use our powers." Thus the little essay combines in a peculiar way Hebbel's twofold way of regarding life—conservative, in his estimate of Socrates, progressive in his own attitude to tradition.

An essay on Wienbarg's *Dramatists of the Present* was complimentary, and its strictures, when they seemed necessary, were in a most considerate tone. Hebbel was doing what he could to keep on friendly terms with the influential leaders. The most important thing in the review, perhaps, was the distinction set up between ancient and modern drama. "Human nature and human destiny," he writes, "these are the two mysteries that the drama endeavors to solve. The difference between the drama of the ancients and the drama of modern times lies in this: with the torch of poetry the ancients attempted to explore the labyrinth of fate; we moderns attempt to refer human nature, in whatever form or distortion it may appear to us, to certain eternal and unchangeable principles."

Hebbel soon found that the gate was not as wide open to him as he imagined. When he sent his humorous story, *Schnock*, to the publisher, Brockhaus, it was returned "with many excuses," and this in spite of its warm recommendation by Tieck. "A bad time for literature," remarks Hebbel, "when a book Tieck has praised cannot find a publisher." It is amusing to see how much he makes of the cordial letter Tieck wrote him on this occasion. It comes in for a share in all his correspondence, when he wishes to impress people with his growing importance, as for example in letters to Wesselburen. In a letter to Charlotte Rousseau, the sister of his deceased friend, he remarks with naive joy: "The letter (from Tieck) is four pages long." The words themselves reveal an intensity of ambition and a pride in achievement thoroughly characteristic of their writer. They also show in what small degree his thirst had been quenched.

But Tieck's praise was not money. That came even more slowly, and we find Hebbel forced to borrow of the

Rousseau family soon after the close of the year. In June a dangerous illness came near ending his life. In August Cotta refused his poems. He was unable to write, and his discouragement in this and the following month was intense. Then, on October 3, he made the entry in his *Diary*: "Yesterday I began my tragedy, *Judith*, and wrote a few scenes, which I like." His joy over having at last discovered a great theme was unbounded. "To-day I continued writing and was successful. Life, situation, and characters leap forth fresh and vigorous in racy prose, without the long, puffy adjectives, which must so often help fill out blank verse. My God! If the thing would only go! If this pause hitherto, this choking of the poetic stream should mean nothing but a new course! I should be happy! My life depends on my poetry. If that is an error, then I myself am one!"

The work proceeded well, suffering its chief interruptions from outward circumstances, both of a financial and a personal kind. He was still borrowing of Elise, to whom, as he said, he owed what he was. Campe, the Hamburg publisher, for whom he had agreed to write a novel on Ditmarsh, was unwilling to advance him money on that venture, while Hebbel could not work without it. He therefore practically gave up the plan. Even worse for his poetic mood were the petty altercations forced upon him by his former benefactress, Amalia Schoppe—on account of such trifles as his failure to see her or her mother in passing on the street, or his association with persons who had incurred her displeasure. All these things reacted with incredible severity on the poet's sensitive nature.

In spite of his troubles, however, he completed his *Judith* by January, 1840, or in less than four months. It is characteristic of Hebbel that he produced rapidly, but at long intervals. Most of his work on a given material was done unconsciously, so that the apparent process of writing seemed brief. He did not work by a detailed plan, and in the case of *Judith* he presumably began actual composition with the fifth act. The origins of the drama are clearly to be found in Munich. As far as so obscure a matter can be

determined, his imagination seems to have begun with the character as a dynamic point. Theodor Poppe has indicated in a subtle way how the two principal characters in his first tragedy, the Hebbel-Judith and the Hebbel-Holofernes, might have arisen in his mind: the one, a conception of the sacrificial virgin, which had first occupied him in the guise of Joan of Arc; the other, a conception of the overwhelming masculine hero, which had occupied him in plans for an Alexander, and a Napoleon. And both were nourished by his relation to Elise Lensing, including the pangs of his conscience, which he vainly tried to reason away.

The close connection between *Judith* and Hebbel's work on a Joan of Arc, with which he hoped to supplant Schiller's *Jungfrau von Orleans*, was pointed out by his first biographer, Emil Kuh. In Hebbel's opinion the chief tragic conception in the latter material was, that Divine Power uses a human being as an instrument to accomplish a certain necessary end, but cannot save that being from assuming personal responsibility for the result. Joan of Arc fulfilled a definite historical mission in saving her country—the country of the Revolution, as Hebbel constructs—but with a tragic outcome for herself. Hebbel was dissatisfied with Schiller's drama, both because this idea was not clearly expressed in it, and because the heroine was too rhetorical. So much we can gather from his *Diary* and *Letters*. Just when he transferred his interest to Judith is unknown. He mentions a painting of Judith that appealed to his imagination while in Munich, and it has been suggested that a passage in Heine's description of the Paris exhibition of paintings in 1831 gave him the all-important motive. Heine said of Vernet's Judith, that she had her own injured body to avenge, as well as to slay the enemy of her country.

Hebbel found his subject, with which he had long been familiar, in the Apocryphal book of Judith. It is there related how Nebuchadnezzar sent out his conquering army under Holofernes, who became a terror to all that dared resist him. When he arrived before the Hebrew town of Bethulia, Judith, the young and beautiful widow of Manasseh, went out to ensnare him, beheaded him during a

drunken slumber, and returned unharmed to the city. There she was hailed with acclaim by the Jews, who rushed forth to attack and disperse their discomfited enemy. In this material, as it stands, Hebbel saw merely a crude story of national pride and triumph. For his feeling this Judith was a monster. He believed that by sacrificing her he could make her a woman, a modern woman, and at the same time secure for his tragedy the quality of the inevitable. His Judith could remain Jewish in her national consciousness, she could become universal in her personal protest against the violence of Holofernes, and tragic in the conflict between her divine mission and her individual fate. In Holofernes he could show the superman, who, in challenging single-handed the general forces that produced him, met his unavoidable doom.

The drama is built up simply. The first act, brief but comprehensive, shows us the Assyrian camp, which is absolutely dominated by the general, Holofernes. He speaks the first and the last word, and everything revolves about him as completely as the planets about their sun. Hebbel believed a dramatic character, as compared with life, must be given an exaggerated degree of self-consciousness, and in Holofernes he made full use of this privilege. The Assyrian general is the superman, the monstrous *Kraftmensch*, holding sway over his men like fate, dispensing life and death on the turning of a hand. With a mocking smile he offers incense to the gods, and in the same mood he destroys their images to set up the worship of Nebuchadnezzar, whom he intends to overthrow. Nowhere has he found serious opposition. He has grown weary of respecting no one but himself, weary of the fawning of weak men. A worthy foeman would be welcome to him. His cruelty proceeds from a vague sort of principle. He is trying out his powers, he wishes to see when and where he will meet opposition, or whether perhaps he is the measure of human strength. The poet has told us what he meant to symbolize in this character. "Holofernes," he says, "is heathendom run wild. In the abundance of his power he grasps the ultimate idea of history, the idea of divinity to be born out of the womb of humanity. But to

his thought he attributes demiurgic force, and he imagines himself to be that which he conceives."¹

This is the man whom Bethulia defies and who has sworn to destroy the town and all its inhabitants with fire and sword. Here we have the one extreme—man defiant in the consciousness of his own power. The second act, almost equally as brief, shows us the other extreme—man relying solely on religious faith in a higher power. "Judith," if we may believe Hebbel, "is the dizzy summit of Judaism, of that people who believed themselves to be in a personal relation with their God."² In these two extremes the poet claims to have represented a fundamental dualism of human nature.

The scene in the second act is in Bethulia. It shows us Judith in conversation with her faithful attendant, Mirza, and her lover, Ephraim. In this act and the beginning of the next we see Judith's resolution take its birth, grow, and mature. In order to explain his heroine, the poet gives her a peculiar history and places her in unrelenting circumstances. She is a virgin widow. After six months of marriage, her husband, Manasseh, who had been warned by a supernatural vision not to touch her, died, leaving her in ignorance of his vision and in despair as to the meaning of her existence.³ But when her town is threatened with destruction, she discovers her mission, and sees in her own beauty the possibility of saving her people. It is noteworthy that the suggestion comes to her from without in an accidental way. And only after every effort on her part to stir men to action has failed, does it take firm root in her mind. Three days of fasting and prayer in sackcloth and ashes convince her that she has been divinely spared and appointed to this end.

With this conviction in her heart, and yet willing to make a further test of it, she goes out into the streets of the city in order to see the condition of the people for herself. In these street scenes, which occupy the remainder of the third act,

¹ Letter of April 3, 1840.

² Letter of April 3, 1840.

³ This motive, that Judith should be neither virgin nor widow, but a virgin widow, was an after-thought of Hebbel, and not a happy one.

Hebbel shows the full reach of his powers. They are terse and energetic in their execution, the situations vivid, the types varied and definite to an astonishing degree. The religious consciousness of the people is everywhere foremost, Jehovah is the invisible center of their thoughts and actions. The town is cut off from water, the greatest confusion and suffering prevail. Citizens quarrel and fight, some doubt Jehovah's power or waver in their allegiance to him. The elders, though themselves pale with consternation, still counsel faith in the God of Moses. The aged Samuel, long burdened with consciousness of a murder committed in his youth, regards himself as the Jonah of his city and breaks out with the confession of his crime. The people are torn hither and thither by conflicting advice, and when those who counsel submission to the heathen are about to prevail, the spirit of the Lord comes upon a dumb man, who for the first time in his life speaks to confound them. Judith appears and supports the chief elder in his resolution. It is reported that Holofernes has sworn to destroy them all—man, woman, and child—no matter what they do. They finally conclude to wait five days longer for Jehovah's assistance.

Through all these scenes flash ominous reports of Holofernes' cruelty. Thus Judith sees the utter helplessness of her people, and at the same time she learns from Achior more of their great foe, who inspires her with horror. But her horror is not unmingled with wonder at his strength and audacity. When she learns that he loves women only as he loves "food and drink," she curses him in her heart. Here is the first definite intimation of a confusion between her divine mission and her personal feelings, of a conflict which later assumes tragic proportions. "Her idea is no longer the product merely of faith in God, but of vanity as well, according to the manner of human nature, which is never wholly pure nor wholly impure."⁴

In this state of mind she goes out to entrap Holofernes (Acts IV and V). At every step it is necessary for her to screw her courage to the sticking-place. At first she tests

⁴ Letter of April 23, 1840.

Holofernes, to discover whether he really would be capable of destroying her people—man, woman, and child. When her last hope is thus cut off a fearful inner struggle begins. However slowly she has been driven to take her resolution, none the less she finds, when the time comes to carry it out, how greatly she has overestimated her strength. And when she does at last carry it out, she draws her strength not from a divine mission, but from a personal insult. "She comes to Holofernes," writes Hebbel, "she finds in him the first and last man of the earth. She feels, without becoming clearly conscious of it, that he is the only one whom she could love. She shudders when he rises in his full greatness before her. She is determined to win his respect and reveals her whole secret (i. e., her intention to kill him). She attains nothing by that, except that, having toyed with her before, he now, misunderstanding her in all her motives, really makes her his prey." For this she kills him while he is asleep. Hebbel does not neglect the probability of this action. It lies in Holofernes' character that he should not defend himself against a woman. He has no respect for them. In their hate he sees only love disguised. He trusts fully to the power of his mere presence over them. To protect himself against a woman would be a confession of weakness.

Judith's hate *is* disguised love. When this love, with all she has to offer, is ruthlessly degraded, the fury of her nature is aroused, and this alone gives her strength to kill her enemy. In the next moment she is made to realize, by a simple statement of Mirza, that the high religious motive which should have inspired her has been replaced by a personal motive. This thought, together with the confusion of heart in its relation to the man she has killed, brings her to the verge of madness. She returns to Bethulia, not as her ecstatic prototype, but a broken woman, demanding death as her reward—if she must bear a child to Holofernes. This IF has been generally condemned, because it weakens the tragic effect by leaving the decision to the future. Hebbel defended it, for a very characteristic reason, as we shall see.

In his *Quintessence of Ibsenism* Shaw describes the "dis-

cussion" as a necessary feature of the modern problem-drama. Just because it is a problem-drama, arising, as he says, "through a conflict of unsettled ideals," the discussion is indispensable. All of Hebbel's dramas, for this same reason, make more or less use of the discussion. In *Agnes Bernauer* it is concentrated more noticeably at the end than in any other of his works, but in all of them it also penetrates the action as a whole, as it should. The action is indeed little more than a dramatic discussion. That is its soul. The acts committed, however violent at times, are but a reflex of the inner conflict.

So in *Judith* the problem is discussed throughout. What is this problem? A closer examination of the drama shows not one, but several. Meyer-Benfey has well described *Judith* as a tragedy combining in a single, direct action a number of ideas more or less contradictory. We know that Hebbel regarded every work of art as a concrete symbol of something universal. He has told us what he thought he had symbolized in *Judith*. To consider that first, we have a Holofernes-problem. This is discussed throughout, but especially in Achior's portrayal of the Jews as strong only in their submission to the will of Jehovah, and in the last act, in the scenes between Judith and Holofernes. The question centers about Holofernes' power, what it means and what he is to do with it. He uses it relentlessly, without restraint, pity, or remorse. He hears only one voice, the voice of his exuberant might. But Judith holds a different view from that. That is not the spirit of the nation whose wise men taught that pride goes before a fall. She warns Holofernes in so many words that his strength will be his snare. "You think it exists in order to take the world by storm. Suppose it was there in order to control itself." To Holofernes such teaching is folly, it is the wisdom born of weakness. And yet Judith was right. Outraged nature, horrified at its own offspring, destroyed him by the hand that he mocked with laughter. From the standpoint of Hebbel's theory Holofernes is a tragic figure, his tragedy being the course of power.

This naturally subserves the Judith-tragedy, which is

the central idea of the play, the one with which Hebbel seems to have begun. Judith was to sacrifice herself for her country, she was to be used and broken in an heroic mission. This was tragedy enough. But Hebbel introduced an additional tragedy, and another problem, in the personal relation between Judith and Holofernes: the problem of man and woman. This is the same problem he discussed in a series of later works. He always shows the man misunderstanding, or underrating, the woman. Holofernes does not comprehend Judith, just as Siegfried does not comprehend Genoveva, Herod does not comprehend Mariamne, and Kandaules does not comprehend Rhodope. Hebbel wrote in his *Diary* that the worst sin was to degrade a human being to a mere means. This is what Holofernes does to Judith, and in the crudest way. This is her personal tragedy, which takes its peculiar character from her love for the oppressor of her country.

If Judith had not loved Holofernes, and merely sacrificed herself for her country, it would have been the tragedy of an heroic mission. Her love for him, however, gives his treatment a personal aspect not essential to that tragedy, but constituting another and different one. Hebbel makes an attempt to combine the two. He explains Judith's change of motive, as we have seen, by declaring it is "according to the manner of human nature, which is never wholly pure, nor wholly impure." Or he indicates more plainly that Judith's real tragedy is her struggle with her womanly weakness. "Your thoughts are growing out beyond you," says Mirza to her. And the poet declares: "In Judith I portray the *deed* of a *woman*—this willing without power, this doing, which is, after all, not action." This points to still another tragic conflict in Judith, which is not really embodied in the drama in the sense that Hebbel means. Judith acts with all the energy we could expect of any human being under the circumstances, only from other motives than she intended.

In making this last suggestion, Hebbel was desirous of bringing his tragedy in direct relation to the "woman's question" of his times. The emancipation of woman was among

the watchwords of Young Germany. In Hebbel's view the whole movement was an abomination. Abolishing the conventions that separate men and women, or overlooking the broad distinctions between their spheres and functions in life, seemed utter confusion to him. "The folly of our times," he writes (April 6, 1841), "which practices idolatry with some abnormal, but brilliant individual women, and which out of a disease, out of a return to chaos, attempts to abstract new laws of life—such folly can repel no one more than myself." In his *Diary*, at this time particularly, we find a number of bitter statements about women, and, even after allowing for the fact that his *Diary* often exhibits varying and contradictory moods, we must conclude that he held a poor opinion of their creative powers. They are considered to be strong only in their qualities as mothers and wives. It is in accord with this spirit that Hebbel claimed to have shown in *Judith* a woman who attempted to act but failed. And thus he supposed that, among other things, he had set up a symbol of woman's limitations in that regard. As a matter of fact we do not receive this impression from the drama. The chief impression we do receive in regard to woman is that she has as full claim to personality as any man, and that the failure to recognize this truth is disastrous. And if Hebbel's works, as a whole, teach any one thing supremely, they do teach this. No modern poet can claim to be so true an advocate of the real rights of woman as Hebbel. There is no essential contradiction in his attitude. He himself furnished the key to his view when he said that woman should be emancipated by man, not by society. This means that she does not need a wider sphere, but to be treated as a human being in the one she already occupies.

Judith, being Hebbel's first drama, and, all things considered, an astonishing success, it is perhaps not surprising that he should have exaggerated the number of things it "symbolized." It was supposed to symbolize, as we have seen, the conflict between Judaism and Heathenism, the tragedy of individuation, or the curse of power, the relation of man and woman, and, particularly, woman's inability to act on a large scale. This would be too much for one work

to symbolize. For example, if Judith represents Judaism, or submission to divine will, in the first part of the tragedy, she represents her individual self in the last part. And, of course, each of these impressions weakens the other. Holofernes does symbolize the curse of power, but Judith does not symbolize woman's powerlessness to act. To sum up, therefore, we may say that the tragedy of Judith is the tragedy of a heroic mission, of an individual sacrificed to save her country; and also, though without organic connection, the tragedy of one individual being used as a mere intoxicant by another.

We now come to the question of why Hebbel placed the final decision of Judith's life or death beyond the close of the drama. This is very intimately connected with his dramatic theory, and we may regard it as a clear instance where he was misled by his theory. With his intense consciousness of the Universal, which we have already noticed in his lyric poems, he must give the Universal a definite part in his drama. In this case the Universal is the focus of the Jewish religious faith, in plain terms, Jehovah. Now, it is true that Hebbel chiefly represents his Universal through human character, the only satisfactory way, and he does this in *Judith* as well. He does not introduce any supernatural links into his chain of motives. But in order to create a certain atmosphere, to make his persons seem real, to establish a certain *milieu*, he makes use of supernatural elements. He does this very sparingly, and very wisely. In *Judith* he invents episodes entirely in keeping with Biblical report, much in the same way as he uses some Biblical language, and for the same purpose. And yet it accords with his wish if these supernatural elements, such as Manasseh's vision on his wedding night, and the loosening of the dumb man's tongue, serve to underscore the Universal acting in and through the purely human agents of the work. As he originally conceived *Judith*, Jehovah was the hero. And this is why he leaves the final word to Jehovah at the end. Whether or not Judith shall bear a child to Holofernes is left to Jehovah's decision, and thus she seeks his approval or disapproval of her action. That this cannot alter her

second, or personal tragedy, is clear. And at the close of the play this impression is so strong in our minds that we already regard her as a tragic victim.

In *Judith* Hebbel first showed the great qualities of his art: a strong grasp of character and situation, a mastery over the means of individualizing, a surprising depth and passion of thought, and a lofty conception of the drama as a symbol of life. The work had its serious faults, of course. We must agree with Meyer-Benfey, that it shows weakness in formative power, that it lacks action, and that the characters often talk at, rather than with one another. One half of the second act is made up chiefly of Judith's expositional narrative; Judith, in her appeal to Ephraim to kill Holofernes, has too clear a consciousness of Hebbel's dramatic theory; or, worse still, the reflections of Holofernes at the beginning of Act IV are altogether too many and too rationalistic; there are some unnecessary monologues, and a number of awkward "asides;" and that the Assyrian general, in his boastings of power, far exceeds human bounds, cannot escape our notice. But, in spite of all this, *Judith* bears on every page the stamp of originality. The irregularities, the exaggerations, and the other disturbing features incidental to a first trying-out of power, could not really counteract the workings of that power.

In local color, peculiar custom and usage, in detailed historical *milieu* as such, Hebbel showed no exaggerated interest in his dramas, and *Judith* is typical in this respect. Yet from the first, it was a settled maxim with him that the characters should not hover in the air, but be firmly rooted in their native soil. He perhaps best expressed his conception in the following comparison: As water, in filtering through different soils, acquires in each case a differing taste, so should the characters in any drama have their distinctive connection. He strove to attain the essential reflex of their times in the minds of his persons. Holofernes he meant to be a typical oriental despot, unchecked in his whims, obeying every caprice, and he was pleased to have his conception approved by a competent scholar. So he reconstructs the Jews in their religious consciousness. He is not profuse with de-

tails, but what he gives counts, because it is characteristic. His general relation to material as history, or tradition, is also typically shown in *Judith*. As he interpreted the present, so he interpreted the past, that is, he stood in a personal relation to it. "Indifferent nature's endless length of thread," he frankly separates into rhythmic parts, and thus disavows realism, in so far as that may be the pursuit of the *ignis fatuus* of "what is."

Hebbel had some fears as to the fate of his first drama on the stage, and this from a double point of view. As satisfying as the scenes appeared to be in imagination, he wondered how they would appear on the stage, in flesh and blood. Then he was in doubt about the audience. He held the opinion that the contemporary audience was used to nothing whole and organic, but to works depending for success on accidental appeals rather than on artistic unity, and made up chiefly of a mixture of sentiment and satire. He never abandoned this view, and laid the blame largely at the door of the Young Germans, who desired to make literature serve all kinds of exterior ends. In spite of his fears, however, *Judith* went on the stage immediately. Through the kindness of Amalia Schoppe, Hebbel sent his manuscript to the well-known actress, Madam Stich-Crelinger in Berlin, who accorded it an enthusiastic reception, and began actively to work for its production. So *Judith* was given at the Court Theater in Berlin for the first time on Monday, July 6, 1840. The audience consisted almost entirely of men. The play met with fair success and was repeated a number of times. It was also given in Hamburg with success before the end of the year. To be sure, the poet was forced to sacrifice one of the chief motives of the drama. The fifth act was changed, so that after Holofernes says to Judith, "Fall down and worship me," she acts only from religious and patriotic motives. The sexual element was omitted entirely. The whole ended with a grand patriotic flare, the Jews rushing in with warlike music after Holofernes' death, while Judith, sword in hand, referred them to Jehovah as their rescuer. The original version was not restored until 1896, when the drama was

presented in the Royal Play-House in Berlin. *Judith* is still among Hebbel's most frequently acted works.

The critical estimates of the new drama varied greatly. What was to be true of each of his dramas was true of this one—it was an event and a problem. He was never damned with faint praise. On the one hand he was hailed as a star of first magnitude, while on the other his tragedy was declared to be valueless for the modern stage. Or he was praised highly, but warned that he must learn his art better. He was censured for modernizing the Biblical material, *Judith* and *Holofernes* were declared to be caricatures; it was said that the last act had been hissed and ridiculed. But the popular scenes were praised and the language commended, though some thought verse would have been better. Hebbel was also declared to be incomparably more poetic than Gutzkow, praise not likely to gain him that author's favor. Wienbarg wrote a review, which Hebbel found, upon second reading, to be favorable. But perhaps the most interesting article was that by Gutzkow in his *Telegraph*, December, 1840. It is skilfully done, and at bottom rather malicious. The writer gives himself the air of extreme objectivity and impartiality. He deplores the necessity of criticism, and seldom offers any praise that he does not manage to retract later. When we expect him to call our attention to some excellence, he uncovers a defect. The central motive for *Judith's* act he finds unfortunate, and thinks that the traditional version was clearer and more credible. Indeed, according to Gutzkow, we must look for some motive extraneous to the ordinary human mind, to some transcendent sphere, which is the real scene of the tragedy. The whole play is allegorical, the cipher of an abstraction. The language, while good, is too reasoned to be poetical. *Judith* is something of a braggart, *Holofernes* a "concept." The popular scenes are good, and the composition "chaste," only the plot lacks variety and complication; in fact, the action is too simple for the modern stage. There can be no doubt that Gutzkow saw in Hebbel an unpleasant rival, doubly unpleasant because so uncompromising.

In the first flush of success, Hebbel, in transient moods

at least, was carried beyond himself. Thoroughly convinced that he had produced a new kind of work, he gave his real contempt for the "sparrows" a more unrestrained expression than ever before. If he brusquely dismissed comparison with Shakespeare as exaggeration and flattery, he none the less "despised people like Gutzkow," who imagined that they were dramatic poets, "because they put a story in dialogue form, or touched up some character anew."⁵ He sent Gutzkow a copy of *Judith*, but not before that author had asked for one in a friendly and flattering letter. The note accompanying this copy (April 1, 1840), was coolly polite, and took occasion to mention the sender's high regard for Gutzkow's critical works, with perhaps an implied emphasis on the word "critical." As a result he received a "politic letter" in reply, just before Gutzkow left Hamburg for Berlin. And the fear that he had offended the "guiding powers" unwisely, already began to oppress him. He had supposed that the writing of *Judith* would at least settle once for all his own doubts on the score of his talent, but the very opposite was true. "The old despairing moods" returned to vex him. "Alas, that there is no safe inner criterion!" he exclaims.

And while *Judith* made him known, it was no open road to success. The Cotta Publishing House—the publishers of Goethe and Schiller—refused his offer of publication. A Leipzig firm to whom he offered some of his stories did not even answer his letter, and the same grim problem of existence stared him in the face as before. He turned again to the more enterprising Campe, Heine's publisher, in Hamburg, who, in March, 1841, bought *Judith* on the most favorable terms—for himself, as the poet discovered later. The price was ten louis d'or. A suit of clothes cost him a little over three, but after his recent experiences he breathed threefold thanks to Heaven for his bargain. "Again a little space in front of me in which I can work and create freely!"

⁵ Briefe II, p. 29.

CHAPTER IV

Genoveva

WHETHER he looked within or without, the poet found cause for serious reflection. On August 13, 1840, he made the following characteristic summary in his *Diary*: "This year is the fullest of my life. But I must confess it, though I can be satisfied with my fate, I cannot be satisfied with myself. The elements of which I consist still rage and ferment within me, as if they were not even enclosed in a confining individual form. One wars with another . . . victory is now on this side, now on that, but the law is lacking! . . . It is difficult, to be sure, infinitely difficult, to elevate one's life to a work of art, when one has such hot blood as I have. . . . Yet it is possible to approach closer and closer to this goal, and I am not even on the way."

A glance at his life during this summer fully confirms his self-accusation. The heaviest responsibilities and obligations were pressing upon him, while he seemed unable to steady himself to meet them. Whatever had been his words from Munich to Elise about pure friendship and the vanished intoxication of the senses, he had forgotten them. In the beginning of November she became the mother of his first son. She had left Hamburg temporarily, and the poet's letters to her during the months immediately preceding the birth of their child present a unique picture. Side by side with the outpourings of his soul in admiration for her unselfishness, we find the frank confession of his love for Emma Schröder, a young Hamburg beauty of wealth and standing, whom he had met in July. This new relation thrilled his passionate nature with a different warmth. "Love," he writes to Elise, who was past youth and had never possessed beauty, "is a different thing from friendship, and it is also true that love is bound to youth and beauty." The ruthless egotism of these words under the circumstances

is astonishing. Hebbel meant it for frankness, which it certainly was. His passion for Emma Schröder, who was not averse to his attentions, was genuine. It was perhaps his strongest love. Insignificant gossip is said to have broken off the relation, which the poet thought might have brightened his whole existence. It is doubtful, however, whether he could have broken with Elise at that time. As strong as was his passion, and as much as he, particularly in these years, considered himself an exceptional being who should not risk his career on conventions, his feelings were in great confusion as a result of his double relation. He had not yet reached that clearness of conviction which later gave him strength to sacrifice Elise, for his affairs had not yet reached their climax of desperation. However much he spoke of friendship, he knew that he had accepted from Elise what friendship should not accept, and he could not suppress the voice of his conscience until years of inner suffering seemed to him in some sort to outweigh his guilt.

Elise's money was practically exhausted, and the problem of supporting three had to be solved. While engaged on *Judith*, the poet had undertaken to compile two histories for a popular series: a *Thirty Years' War* and a *Joan of Arc*. The compensation was very slight, but better than nothing. Most of the necessary reading had been done in Munich. These histories were published under an assumed name, and when taxed with their authorship Hebbel denied it outright. He was unwilling to be known in a public way in connection with such efforts, inasmuch as he intended to enroll his name among the poets. The histories themselves are interesting and, though based entirely on secondary sources, they show individuality in interpretation and great skill in arrangement. Hebbel had a theory of history, pretty well formulated, as Werner has pointed out,¹ in his words to Wihl, that "it furnishes the proof that everything is necessary." The Reformation and the Thirty Years' War together, in his opinion, prevented Christianity from sinking back into heathenism, and he groups his material energeti-

¹ W. IX, p. XXII.

cally to illustrate that view. The persons involved he explains with a psychological depth that bespeaks the dramatist. His story of Joan of Arc is particularly interesting, in view of his relation to that subject as possible dramatic material. The existence of Schiller's play, however, and its firm hold on the stage and, what was more important, the transfer of his interest to *Judith*, prevented him from undertaking that task. His opinion of Schiller's *Jungfrau* varied considerably from time to time. First, he says the subject was "botched" by Schiller, that his Maid is a "stage-maid," but later he speaks of Schiller's work as a great poem. His final opinion is that expressed in his review of the *Correspondence between Schiller and Körner* (1848), where he is unable to understand why Schiller chose a subject demanding a psychological treatment and therefore out of his realm. Hebbel thought that Joan must be carefully guarded from introspection, that, like a sleep-walker, she must go on her way, and even at the last plunge with closed eyes into the abyss. Her unaffected *naïveté* should suffer no interruption. In this sense his summary of her life is made. She is regarded, like Judith, as a sacrifice demanded by divine powers. The miraculous events in her career are related simply, with no attempt to account for them. And in the eyes of Joan, genuine religious leader that she is, Heaven and earth exist side by side. The whole story is told with its author's customary energy of outline and effective grouping, which make it charming reading from first to last.

In the meantime Hebbel had begun to write a second tragedy, *Genoveva* (September, 1840), which was completed by March of the succeeding year. The new work was in nearly every way a contrast to *Judith*. The heroine is a Christian saint, a woman that is great through her suffering, while Judith's tragedy results from her action. The new drama was written in blank verse, evidencing in meter and language a thorough study of Goethe and Kleist. It is incomparably more poetic than *Judith*, and in this respect the first two acts of it mark the height of Hebbel's attainments, with the sole exception of *Gyges and His Ring*. Its heroine is made up of the two women who most influenced the poet's thought during its execution. *Genoveva* combines the martyr-

like patience that Hebbel attributed to Elise Lensing, and the youth and beauty that inspired him with passion for Emma Schröder. From this passion, no doubt, the opening acts of the drama, which were written in a single dash of power, draw their fire. But the composition of the new work, as a whole, is far inferior to that of *Judith*. It is less suited to the stage than any other of its author's tragedies.

The beginnings of the second tragedy, like those of the first, point us back to Munich. During his student days there Hebbel, not then acquainted with Tieck's *Genoveva*, had formulated in a private criticism of the Storm and Stress version of the same material by Maler Müller his own conception of its dramatic content. And with such precision that his words read almost like a synopsis of the later drama. The material, in its essential form, is very old, going back to the oriental story of the Israelitish Sadi and his pious wife. In its medieval surroundings and settings it was kept alive by various more or less unorganic accretions, until a better organized version was given it by the German monk, Martin Kochem, in the eighteenth century. Inasmuch as Hebbel follows the tradition rather closely it is worth while to outline that here. Count Siegfried, in setting out to fight against the Moors, takes leave of his wife, Genoveva. She faints in his arms, and when she awakes Siegfried commits her to the care of his friend, Golo, for the time of his absence. She faints a second time, and Siegfried, though bitterly weeping, departs without more ado. Golo is inflamed with love for Genoveva, who, after she has repelled him three times, at last threatens to tell her husband of his importunities. Thereupon his love is changed to hate and fear. By an infamous intrigue he accuses her of having committed adultery with a servant, Drago, and throws her into prison, where her child is born. A message is sent to Siegfried, accusing her, and he orders Drago to be killed. Golo rides to meet him in Strassburg on his way home, and there a witch, the sister of Golo's assiduous nurse, shows Siegfried Genoveva's fall, pictured in a magic mirror. Genoveva is condemned to death and Golo returns to the castle to give her over to the murderers. They, however, take pity on her and

allow her to escape with her child. Siegfried is uneasy in spirit because of what he has done, and Golo leaves the castle through fear of his master's suspicion. The spirit of Drago appears, convincing Siegfried of his wife's innocence. While hunting in the forest, seven years later, he discovers his wife and boy, whom Heaven has protected. Golo is torn in pieces by oxen. There is a complete reconciliation, followed by an account of Genoveva's gracious death.

What chiefly interested Hebbel in this material was the character of Golo. Here was a man led to destruction by his deepest and truest emotion, a problematic case, illustrating the dualistic and self-destructive elements of life. The entire drama is built up on the terrible words, intended by the poet for the text, but finally omitted, words fortunately not altogether true: "What a man may become, he is already." It is in this sense, however, that the character is developed. How Golo, a mere youth, whose first and only love centers on Genoveva, can come to betray his friend and, advancing step by step, involve himself in irreparable wrong, how this process has its subtle beginnings beneath his own consciousness at first, and then accelerates its movement until it becomes a settled purpose—such was the problem Hebbel undertook to solve. Himself under the influence of a passion to which he dared not yield, he created a poetic character who pursued the fatal course to its inevitable end. In Golo the self-justification of a strong passion is carried to a logical conclusion. Every passion is an elemental force, in itself neither right nor wrong. The manner and circumstances of its appearance alone can determine whether it is to be a blessing or a curse.

The triangle drama, however old in art, presents difficulties rarely solved. It is almost impossible to draw the lines so that some one of the three persons will not appear incomprehensible or brutal. Especially is this true of a psychological treatment, which was Hebbel's forte. In his tragedy two of the persons are plain enough. Genoveva's soul is as clear as crystal, untainted and undimmed. Golo, likewise, pursues one straightforward course from beginning to end. He believes his love for Genoveva is stronger than

Siegfried's, and hence justified. But the position of Siegfried is incomprehensible, so much so that the most competent critics disagree in their estimate of him. The poet himself, in the analysis he wrote before the tragedy, put the chief blame on Siegfried for his failure to comprehend his wife. When he came to the actual execution, however, for fear of making him crude he incurred the risk of making him uncertain.

The scene of parting, constituting at the same time the general exposition, becomes in Hebbel's treatment the pivot of the action. It is a masterpiece of dramatic poetry. Genoveva, the saintly, and as fair as she is saintly, who has in gentleness of spirit shared each of her husband's kisses with thoughts of Heaven, and never yet revealed to him her love in full intensity, is overcome in the moment of separation, and shows herself to be "a woman, a woman like none on earth." Golo, at first an involuntary witness of this scene, is chained to the spot by an irresistible power, as feelings till then dormant in him, burst into his consciousness. It is this moment, fatal to all three persons, that Hebbel describes as "overwhelming and tragic in the highest degree." In this moment Genoveva's abandon comes to Siegfried as a new revelation of her love; in this moment he receives the confession of her approaching motherhood. She faints in his arms, and he, laying his wife in the arms of his friend, steals away, as Golo says, like a coward, because a man must part "before the tears come into his eyes." Up to this point, indeed, Siegfried's true and beautiful words reveal no inner weakness; they do not suggest that he will fail in the supreme trial; but the instant and manner of his departure prepare us to some extent for that contingency. Too much praise cannot be given to the psychological truth of Golo's words and actions under these circumstances. His weakening faith in Siegfried finds a powerful auxiliary in his awakened love for Genoveva. Against his will, as if another voice were speaking out of him, he indicates to Genoveva in subtle words the lethargy of her husband's feelings.

Hebbel's power of exposition is always great, and it is seen to exceptional advantage in *Genoveva*. Not, however,

from the standpoint of the stage. An almost impossible situation is offered us. Siegfried and Genoveva in the foreground, and Golo in the background, speaking over their heads to the audience. The inner action is very concise through the first two acts. Beginning with the third act the course of events becomes too broad and devious. It is not Genoveva, but Golo, who occupies the center of our attention, especially after the opening scenes. She suffers, it is true, but her misfortunes are external, her own saintly nature is untouched with earthly evil. There is no conflict in her soul, and Golo is doomed to failure from the beginning.

Golo's character is explained in his saying that the deepest repentance does not lead back to the right way. On the contrary, it crushes its victim with the feeling of his own worthlessness. This is the active principle of his self-destruction. Terrified at first by his love and faithlessness, he attempts to leave the decision to God by flagrantly risking his life. But God places the decision back on him, a fact that he never seems fully to realize. Instead of inferring that he should conquer himself, he infers that he is "born to be a villain." Genoveva's goodness only accelerates the evil in him. Recognizing the noble qualities in his youthful mind she continually endeavors to arouse his better nature and recall him to a sense of his duty. The only result is that he regards her perfection as the measure of his depravity. He conceives a mania for forcing her into some error, even of the slightest kind, in a fruitless effort to change the measure, since he cannot change that to which the measure applies. A single flaw in her would relieve, it seems to him, the burden of horror that weighs upon his conscience. But the good is inexorable in its bright nature and Golo must follow out the path which he knows in advance, and every step of which is renewed agony to his soul.

After Genoveva has remained true in prison her torture is capable of one higher degree, the doubt of her husband. He is the only man from whom she has the right to expect absolute trust, because he is the only one who, like God, had seen into the depths of her soul. This absolute trust Golo now sets himself to destroy. If he can undermine Siegfried's

faith in her perhaps he can make her unworthy of it. If so, the result will justify the means and show that, after all, she was but on his own level.

Siegfried, returning from the war, lies wounded in Strassburg. Thither Golo rides to see him and begins to poison his mind. Siegfried succumbs to three considerations. First, Golo is his best friend and a brave man. "I may not know the other sex," he declares, "but I do know mine." How could such a man lie? In the second place, Golo lies with the greatest plausibility, meeting each question naturally and with convincing detail. This episode is a masterpiece of invention, and it is a proof of the sincerity of Golo's villainy, as well as of the energy with which Hebbel seized the central quality of his character. In the third place, Siegfried consults a magic mirror and, ignorant of its owner's share in the plot, finds Golo's report confirmed in the most striking manner. After this he is convinced. As he feared the parting, so he lacks courage for the meeting again, and without a hearing from his wife he turns over to Golo his sword and his signet ring, at once the authorization and the instrument of her execution—an act that outrages our sensibilities in the highest degree.

Thus armed, Golo returns to the castle to tempt Geneveva again. When she sees the signs of Siegfried's faithlessness she exclaims: "In this hour my misery begins!" Golo places a letter in her hand, a full confession of his crimes, while he holds a cup of poisoned wine, which he offers to drink at her command. Unable to gain even this concession, he sends her out to be murdered, but she is allowed to escape with her child. Golo is killed by Casper, after confessing his sins, blinding himself, and requesting to be exposed to the wild animals in the forest. Siegfried is left to the tormenting doubt of his wife's guilt. He is a broken man. His terrible experience—for either his wife or his friend must have been false to him—has given him a glance into the innermost depths of nature, and shown him the ultimate isolation and loneliness of all individual life. At best we can never know and understand one another. These conclusions of Siegfried, which are only too well exemplified in the

tragedy itself, justify us in regarding the work as deeply pessimistic. It is true that for Genoveva herself a way is found out of this pessimism, as she gradually transfers her love from earthly to heavenly objects.

Eleven years later Hebbel composed a sequel to *Genoveva*, because it was demanded by the traditional material. Also he had planned it from the first, perhaps, for a certain scene in the drama points forward to it. Here Genoveva and her son are restored to Siegfried. But, in the words of the Munich analysis, which are here applicable, he finds her again, "only to gain the crushing conviction that the bond between her and himself is torn for time and eternity. For Genoveva this return is the final glorification. Now even her picture is pure."

Thus we have the three main characters outlined in their human relations to one another: Golo, the victim of distorted passion, the manifestations of which cause us to shudder at the abysses of our common human nature; Genoveva, whose sufferings proceed from her refusal to sin, and from her body's beauty, which became her curse (line 3087); Siegfried, whose lack of insight leads him to punish the good and reward the bad. And yet that is not the whole of the tragedy, though it would seem to be enough. Indeed, so far, we have practically omitted to mention the so-called idea, and a fourth character, whom Hebbel did not consider a subordinate person in the drama. The idea, a mystical one, was formulated by the poet as the atonement of evil through the suffering of saints. The world is represented as having reached its acme of sin. Such is the meaning of the important scene in which the aged Jew is hounded to death by the servants in the castle, who even propose to crucify him in front of their sacred crucifix. Golo becomes a representative of this evil in the world. And especially is this the case with Margarete, the sister of Golo's foster-mother, both of whom assist him in his plans. Margarete is the witch whose magic mirror deceives Siegfried. In that scene she is expanded into a representative of the devil on earth, her character, in other words, is intentionally symbolized by the poet. As a symbol of conquering good, the spirit of Drago

appears in the same scene, and we are told that the measure of sin is full, that Genoveva remains sinless because she must help atone for the world by sacrifice, and that she will finally triumph. The attempt to make this idea support the drama is a failure, as the poet himself admitted. The human characters themselves were sufficient, and the mystical idea, while it may be both in itself and in its treatment quite in keeping with good poetry, is not in keeping with the tone of the tragedy. Up to that scene Hebbel works with psychological means and his sudden leap into mysticism seems incongruous.

The structure of *Genoveva* as a drama has effectively kept it off the stage. In the reverse ratio of *Judith*, it contains three fifths conversation and two fifths action, though so related that action closes what conversation begins. This would not be decisive, however. The main trouble is that the drama comes to be almost a monologue for the exposition of Golo's part. It also contains a good many epic elements, especially disturbing at the beginning of the fourth act. One of the chief persons is not introduced until the third act, which, besides that, breaks up into a number of episodes. The last two acts are likewise too long and slow in their movement. Changes of scene are frequent. In fact, Hebbel did not consider the stage much in writing this work. At the beginning of his career he seems to have made a dangerous distinction, which he soon gave up, between dramatic poetry and stage plays. As Meszlény points out, however, the total action in *Genoveva* falls into three larger groups, which might well be arranged as three one-act performances: Acts I and II, Act III, and Acts IV and V. Each of these groups observes unity of time, if not of place, already.

Even a brief summary of *Genoveva* should not fail to comment on the care with which Hebbel has worked out the subordinate parts—the servants in the castle, and particularly the character of Crazy Claus. Just as in *Judith* he presented a dumb man half inspired, so here he has made an unconscious representative of a higher power. Such persons cut off from worldly wisdom are, such seems to be the idea, like children, in immediate contact with the sources of life.

Through them, as through a medium, it flows at times with irresistible, impetuous force, like the inspiration of the poet. In Crazy Claus Hebbel conceived a striking part and executed it well. In all the servant scenes, and particularly in the episode with the Jew, he shows great powers of individualizing. And again, as in *Judith*, he knows how to surround us with the subtle atmosphere of what he calls a "poetic time." We are in a lonely castle, in the midst of an endless forest, separated by days and weeks from other human habitation. This isolation doubly inflames Golo's passion, and places Genoveva completely at his mercy. And as it is reflected in the main situation, so it is reflected in the conversation of the servants, and in the smaller episodes.

When Hebbel sent *Genoveva* to Madam Stich-Crelinger in Berlin for consideration, it was returned, ostensibly because a drama on the same theme by Raupach was already in the repertoire. Raupach was one of those popular play-makers necessary to meet the demands of the modern stage. As successor to Kotzebue, he was the chief support of the German theater from 1821 to about 1841. In the seven years between 1829 and 1835, he produced thirty-nine new plays. A poet like Hebbel could not compete with a Raupach. *Genoveva* was first given in Prague, in translation, May, 1849.¹ It was not given in Germany until long after that, and has never been a great success on the stage. It was published by Hoffmann and Campe, bearing the date 1843.

¹ Br. V, p. 364, Note.

CHAPTER V

A COMEDY AND A BOOK OF VERSE

HEBBEL finished *Genoveva* in March, and by November of the same year (1841), he completed a third drama, *The Diamond*, which he had, however, begun several years earlier. He provided this work, a comedy, with a prologue in verse, setting forth his views on that form of the drama, and sent it to Berlin to compete for a prize that was being offered. He failed to win this, if for no other reason because his comedy was of an entirely different nature from those that fell within the limit of the contest. *The Diamond*, which the poet immediately declared to be his best work, received no favor at the hands of any stage director, and was not published by Campe until 1847.

Hebbel demanded that comedy symbolize the world to the same extent as tragedy, only in a different way. Both are the same coin, though each side presents a separate face. In *The Diamond* he sets out to give us, in comic mask, an image of life. Freely translated, certain verses of the Prologue read as follows: "In the jewel I see the vain show of earthly life, and all the emptiness of earth represented in comic guise." Then he vaguely outlines the story, which here may be given a little more definitely.

In accordance with the custom of the royal house, a certain princess is intrusted with a precious diamond. As far back as the time of Barbarossa, so ran the legendary account, this jewel had been given to the founder of the family by a spirit in the shape of a maimed soldier. It was a talisman, which the same apparition would demand again when the family was doomed to extinction. The Princess, who is excessively nervous—"rather tender," the Prologue says—is approached by a real maimed soldier, a man of huge stature, and also of ghostly appearance because he is on the verge of starvation. Terrified, she throws the dia-

mond at his feet and, returning to the palace, falls a prey to a dangerous nervous illness, bordering on insanity. Her physicians declare the finding of the diamond to be essential to her recovery, and the King sends out proclamations of a large reward to any one who will return it. A young Prince, who is to marry the Princess, takes part in the search.

In the meantime the soldier has died in the house of a peasant, who thus comes into the possession of the diamond, though he has no idea of its value. His suspicions are aroused, however, when a peddling Jew offers him a dollar for it, and he refuses to bargain at all. The Jew, therefore, steals the diamond, which he swallows under close pursuit, in order not to have it found on his person. He has thus enormously increased his personal value. And thus, too, is brought about that situation that Taillandier ironically terms *la delicate invention: un mal d'entrailles en cinq actes!*¹ The Jew falls into the hands of a quack doctor; the Jew, the peasant, the doctor are all brought before a judge. The three vote for an operation, but they are all in turn cheated by the bailiff, who wants the diamond for himself. The diamond is finally restored to the royal family, and the Princess is healed, but not before each person is characterized by his attitude to the possession of property. As the only honest man of them all, the peasant receives the promised reward.

This brief outline, however, is in one sense misleading. Of the two elements making up the play—the naive comedy of the lower classes, and a more poetic and fantastic background—the former is by far the more important and successful. The comedy opens, in fact, with a scene in the peasant's hut. In characterizing the lower classes Hebbel was much more at home than in the serious parts of the work. His experiences in the office in Wesselburen furnished him the colors he needed when he came to portray these various types, which stand out with the distinctness of a Dutch painting. And in them the poet exemplifies with great skill his favorite view, that in comedy the characters

¹ Revue de deux mondes, 1852, Vol. IV, p. 543.

themselves must be entirely in earnest, entirely unconscious of the futile nature of their doings. Only the spectator must be amused. In this respect the work is eminently successful. The peasant Jacob, in his stolid, stupid, good-natured honesty; Doctor Pfeffer, in his inventive quackery and ready shamelessness; Block, in his unsurpassable willingness to be duped; Kilian, in his general inability to cope with the situation; Benjamin, the Jew, in his cunning, frustrated by its own refinement—such persons are not to be found outside the works of real poets. And among these worthy people some amusing scenes occur, as when Doctor Pfeffer endeavors to convince the judge that Jacob is so honest he could not lie if he wanted to, while Jacob, too honest to accept such a character, argues that he could lie if he wanted to.

In spite of its excellent qualities, however, *The Diamond* was not a success on the stage. As pointed out by both Kuh and Werner, it has a twofold weakness. In the first place its humor, while genuine, is somewhat monotonous. And, in the second place, the work falls into two parts which are poorly connected. Nor are the serious parts, considered alone, convincingly worked out. The poet himself recognized this fact, and even found fault with the comic scenes for wavering between simplicity and satire. But he always maintained that the idea underlying this comedy was an excellent one, and to the last he planned a reconstruction of it. The new version, however, was never made.²

Hebbel's letters and diary during the second Hamburg period indicate the same restlessness of mind as that which had characterized him hitherto—a swinging from one extreme mood to another, in one moment the exuberance of creative power, in the next the gloom of complete despair. He kept up his continual reading, especially on the drama and its problems—Lessing, Euripides, Plato. Other dramatic plans thronged his mind: a *Moloch*, which he intended to erect as his chief monument; a *Clara*, later published as

² *The Diamond* has been given several times in recent years with some success. See *Bühne und Welt*, X. Jahrgang, 1907-08, S. 830; XI. Jahrgang, 1908-9, S. 473.

Mary Magdalene; and an *Achilles*. Though none of these works was written at the time, he realized in the summer of 1842 his long-cherished plan of publishing a collection of his lyric poems. Again it was Campe who made the venture for him. The little volume, containing somewhat more than one hundred and fifty poems, was dedicated to the memory of Hebbel's Munich friend, Emil Rousseau.

By examining this collection more carefully and by occasional reference to later poems, we may seek to gain some notion of Hebbel as a lyric poet. In this field, as well as in the drama, he had high aspirations and very definite ideas. Here too, perhaps, he considered his work something of an innovation. Certainly so if, among other indications, we may accept as orthodox the view of a faithful disciple, Emil Kuh. After defending Hebbel against the often repeated charge of too much reflection in his lyric poetry, he asserts that this is due to the development of the type, which had outgrown pure melody and come to embrace more subtly differentiated and contradictory emotional shades. Heine is said to exemplify this new type to some extent, and Hebbel even better. We shall see, in fact, that Hebbel does attempt to give expression to what might be called his metaphysical woes. Sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

The majority of the poems in the collection of 1842 had been written before the second Hamburg period. Of those written during that period the best, taken as a whole, are what might be termed thought-poems, treating of such subjects as the purpose of pain in life, the spirit of the times, the function of the poet, man and woman, human society. A great many of them are sonnets, a form preferred by Hebbel for serious content. In discussing these thought-poems it does not seem necessary to attempt to deduce a philosophical system from them; still less to regard them as the expression of such a system. They are more or less emotional; they shift from one point of view to another. Extensive interpretations in this sense have been undertaken for his early poems. Dr. Paul Zincke has given a plausible outline of Hebbel's progress in thought as reflected in his verse from Wesselburen to Heidelberg. According to this sum-

mary, Hebbel began with the Christian view of life, then came under Schiller's materialistic youthful poetry, attempted a fusion of these two principles, and passed over gradually to a naive pantheism, a transition that is complete in the Heidelberg poems. The influence of any particular philosophy up to this time is more than doubtful. This is as far as it is safe to go in interpreting Hebbel's lyric poetry, whether early or late. A much more comprehensive treatment of the subject is given by Arno Scheunert. Scheunert admits to his discussion more of Hebbel's varied and peculiar expressions than any one else. Hebbel was intensely interested in his own psychology, because he supposed that he could observe that with certainty. He committed the most remarkable reflections to his *Diary*, a really monumental work. He put down the truest statements, as well as those that seem eccentric, fantastic, or absurd. Speculations on the sensation of stones and plants, on the possible evolution of the lower form to the higher—inanimate forms, nature, man, God—on the transmigration of the soul, on the symbolic meaning of wine or gold, on dreams, on animal psychology, on a thousand subjects, are to be found there: passing whims and fancies, side by side with the most profound observations. Often he made some such fantastic idea the basis of a poem, usually unsuccessful. We are struck particularly with a Novalis-like tendency, at times, to draw no practical distinction between mind and matter, the manifestations of which are directly related as cause and effect. Scheunert discovers in all of Hebbel's work a definite metaphysical center, of which that work is the symbol. He is able to present many surprising interpretations of notes, poems, etc., to uphold this view. He has even established to his own satisfaction that Hebbel's language is altogether symbolical, that his words mean more than they seem to mean. When the poet speaks of Heaven, Paradise, the Infinite, immortality, the morning-red, gold, light, flower, rose, spirit, sun, he means a metaphysical abstraction; and he means the opposite abstraction, if he should speak of hell, devil, earth, dust, darkness, storm, etc. All natural happenings, however innocent they may appear, acquire a moral

significance. According to Scheunert, Hebbel may be read in two ways: naively, that is, without understanding what he means to say; and pantragically, or with an insight into his metaphysics. Birds, butterflies, squirrels, are all moral creatures; snakes, on the other hand, immoral. The measure of the impulse of anything, organic or inorganic, toward a higher degree of union with the Ideal, is the measure of its morality. The subjective caprice of the poet, which he, however, mistakes for an objective test, is the judge in this matter. "Red" is the color of life; "black," that of destruction; honey and wine become noble concentrations of the *Natur-Geist*; love is self-consciousness of the Ideal; odor signifies longing, sacrifice, gratitude; white, the color of spirits, means "ethereal" or "immortal."

It would seem plain, though Scheunert does not expressly draw such an inference, that if we must read Hebbel's poetry with a metaphysical glossary we had as well let his poetry alone, as far as esthetic enjoyment goes. But the case is really not so bad as that. Admitting that many of his poems are in the same category as his dedication to *Mary Magdalene*, i. e., according to his own opinion, metaphysical and therefore bad; admitting all that Scheunert says quite truly about the apotheosis of a pet squirrel, and admitting in general the danger of Hebbel's speculative moods for his poetry, we find still remaining a number of poems in his collections that can be read with great enjoyment, naively, like any other poems. We do not need, as Scheunert does, to interpret a beautiful poem like the *Sommerbild* pantragically. When Hebbel speaks of the *white* and the *red* rose, we are not driven to say that *white* butterflies are the least poetic, the most ordinary, and that therefore the poet must have used *white* here to signify a greeting from the spirit world. (See Op. cit., p. 173, and note.) We have our naive pleasure in the contrasted colors and are satisfied.

With these necessary explanations, we may proceed to consider the collection of 1842. More than most poets Hebbel wrote *sub specie æternitatis*. Among his chief traits, it can not be too often repeated, was a vivid sense of the Universal, accompanied by a proportionate sense of the fleeting

character of individual life. For most of us the Universal remains largely an abstraction, a mere word. It was more than that to Hebbel. To him it was an ever-present, living power—the spirit in poetry, the state in politics, custom in society, and a reality as far as sense or thought can reach. His seizure of this reality is reflected not mainly by thought, which would have made him a philosopher, but by emotion, which made him a poet. In his wildest joy he knows that death is but two paces behind. Or he portrays the transition from youth to age in a lovely girl, so that we view life as a tale that is told. The late summer rose, in its full bloom, suggests to him with a cosmic shudder, that “so far in life is too near death.” A moonlight night in Rome calls up three stages of evanescent life: Rome’s soldiers, who lay dead on the battlefield beneath that moon; Rome herself in ruins, a shadow of her former might; and both pictures but a symbol of how worlds shall pass away. And in this whirl of fleeting individual existence the poet himself is caught. Even when he can forget his own *ego* long enough to proclaim the vision he has seen, he feels that he is the voice of one crying in the wilderness. He compares himself to a tree in a desert: the fruit is ripe, but there is no one to taste it. And the very creative joy, which like the breath of God, flashes through him, shows him in passing that he is “doubly dust.” It is therefore not surprising that he occasionally looks out with longing eyes into the calm ocean of the Universal, into Nirvana, to pray: “Sleep, sleep, only sleep! No awaking and no dream!”

But this is only a part of the picture. Hebbel was a fighter. Especially in many of the Hamburg poems of the second period there is the spirit of battle, of defiance, and, at the same time, the comprehension of the functions of pain and suffering in human life. He did not seek peace by turning his back on the problem of life as he saw it, the baffling problem of grounding individual being on some eternal rock. In the two sonnets, *Mystery* and *Ether*, he expresses his yearning to discover the thread that binds him to God and nature, so that he may follow it back to its source. But at the same time he is convinced that this is not in human power.

In another, entitled *The World and I*, he finds that paradoxical synthesis so characteristic of all his works—the idea that we best find ourselves by losing ourselves. “The road to thee leads through the Universe.” Here is a distinction between egotism and individuality, or inner harmony. There is a way of serving “best both yourself and the highest plan.” What this “highest plan” is perplexed his brain no little. Sometimes he sees an ultimate unity in all things, at other times a dualism, a struggle between light and darkness, resembling that between Ormuzd and Ahriman. But man must not despair. Pain is an element of life itself. “All life is robbery. Sparks that have sprung from the stars burn to illuminate the world, and dust swallows them up. Now begins a sacred warfare! In all forms surge highest and lowest powers. Struggle, and the victory will be yours.” Perfect victory would thus mean an end of individual life, a reunion with the source of light. Such baffling problems does Hebbel press into his verse!

With equal intensity was he concerned with his own mission. The Romanticists, even the earlier Schelling, did not more completely apotheosize the poet than did Hebbel. “Art,” he writes in his *Diary*, Feb. 20, 1842, “is the conscience of mankind.” And he considered the poet to be the high-priest of art. The poet is the “chaste priest at the altar of life.” To him the keys of the universe are given, so that he may open any gate and wander where he will. What he says in his hours of inspiration is the soul of the world manifesting itself through him. He is the Proteus of the spirit, equally at home in all forms, but bound in none. His function is to interpret life, to give men a fuller consciousness of the life-process, and thereby help them attain the utmost harmony of spirit possible within its limits. This view of the poet is abundantly expressed in the collection of 1842. Hebbel exercises his priest-like task in fine verses entitled *To Young Men*. Here he speaks like the impassioned prophet of the soul, not imparting worldly wisdom, but indicating the pathway to a deeper life. To the youth he says: Be your own creator! Make yourself the master of your fate! Pray, but pray only to the spirit within your—

selves. "Life is deep solitude. Not a drop of dew forces itself into the stubborn bud, until its own inner fire bursts it." God loves man erect, not in the dust. Out of his own dark breast man makes his heaven of stars.

The high valuation here placed upon man and man's struggles finds different, and even better expression, in a poem entitled *The Chief Commandment*. This poem is in three stanzas of four lines each, the first line in every case being the same, so that the commandment, which is embodied in it, is repeated three times as a beginning refrain. This arrangement, for which Hebbel shows fondness elsewhere as well, is particularly effective here because of the insistence lent by it to the precept he is giving. The poem, which is among his best, may be paraphrased as follows: Respect man! And remember that, however concealed it may be, there is in him the germ of all great things, some day to be unfolded. Respect man! And remember that, no matter how deep his slumber, the breath of life that can awaken him may come perhaps from you. Respect man! Eternity has an hour in which each soul will either heal your wounds or still your yearnings.

The collection, however, is not all in one severe tone. It contains some of the poet's best ballads: *Fair Hedwig*, which he later recognized as an unconscious reflex of Kleist's *Katie of Heilbronn*; *The Lord's Prayer*, in which a robber patricide is killed by his own son; *The Child at the Well*, in danger of falling in while the nurse is asleep. In the ballad he strove for movement, terseness, climax, dramatic effect. In the subjects he satisfied the romantic elements of his nature, which had considerable nourishment in his early reading, while in the form his epic talent, with its tendency toward the highest precision, was seen to the best advantage.

Hebbel wrote comparatively few poems purely inspired by nature. He did not revel in it pantheistically, like Goethe, nor commune with it intimately, like Mörike, and rarely could he use it skillfully, like Heine, as a symbol of love. A poem like the *Winter Landscape*, which is content with merely giving the impression of a desolate scene, is excellent of its kind, but almost unique in his production.

The aspect of nature that appealed to him most strongly was the night, and that in a more awe-inspiring than soothing fashion. The peculiar sonnet, *Hyperion* (Der Sonnenjüngling), in which the sun-youth is astonished to find the earth grow beautiful beneath his glances, ignorant that these cause the change—this sonnet can hardly be classed as a nature poem. Its idea is somewhat fantastic, in which direction Hebbel often inclined, but it appeals to us none the less, like some haunting myth.

Hebbel also wrote few preeminent love poems. There was in this collection a cycle entitled *Early Love*, which treated of love from the standpoint of a youth, in somewhat the same way as Chamisso's cycle from the standpoint of the girl. The beginning of love, its blossoming, its pathetic loss through death, and a closing reconciliation to loss—such are the general stages of emotion presented. Hebbel's best love poem, *To Hedwig*, has already been mentioned. Another fine one, which he himself valued highly, is *The Last Glass*, celebrating the moment of separation. Here again the stanzas begin alike, and end with a refrain. Hebbel lacks the lightness of touch characteristic of Heine or Mörike. The Anacreontic was out of his sphere, his various attempts in that direction being failures. For this his passion is too intense, his rhythm too obtrusive, his choice of words too rhetorical, the whole movement of his mind too mighty. So when, for example, in the little poem, *Rose and Lily*, he tries the kind of thing Heine did so well in *The Fir and the Palm*, he fails utterly. While Heine is careful to indicate no closer association between fir and palm than the vagueness of a dream, Hebbel has the lily embrace the rose leaf, and this physical touch breaks the poetic spell. It would be easy to point out many instances where his associations seemed forced.

Other phases of life besides love appealed to Hebbel, of course. He knew how to write sympathetic and tender verses *To an Old Maid*, to describe the feelings of a young girl when she first becomes conscious of her beauty, and blushes with shame at this discovery; to picture the pain of a young mother upon the death of her child, and the for-

sakenness of the child bereft of its mother. In this last named poem, *The Child*, is the nameless pathos of an irreparable but unsensed loss. The impression is the same as that produced on us by Klinger's etching, *Mother and Death*. In both works we see the dead mother and the questioning child, eyes and voice filled with wonderment, touching in its unconsciousness, while from beyond this scene come to us faint suggestions of the surrounding world, into which it must now launch forth alone.

In the matter of lyric form, finally, Hebbel was no innovator, just as he was not, broadly speaking, in the use of language, or in dramatic technique. In these phases of his art he was more or less conservative. He was through and through an esthetic nature, though his form-talent was difficult to develop. The harmony of his art he characterized as a harmony won from dissonance, as good a brief statement of the case as can be found. He was not always certain in discriminating between poetic and unpoetic subjects, nor in realizing when he had failed to convert the dissonance of his elements into harmony. This difficulty was often increased by his method of work. Many of his poems are the expansion of some experience, or even of some philosophic speculation, noted down in prose form in his *Diary* at a previous time. Sometimes he wrote good poetry in this way, but more often the immediate inspiration was hopelessly sacrificed. A good example of this procedure is found in the sonnet entitled *Man and History*. On July 27, 1840, he noted in his *Diary* a rather fanciful idea about the evolution, or gradual perfecting of a god. In September, 1841, he composed a sonnet on this theme: History is the unknown artist, and man, the future god. But there is nothing more memorable in the second form than in the first.

Hebbel now stood before the world as the author of three larger works: *Judith*, *Genoveva*, and a volume of poems. As yet *The Diamond* was unknown to the public. In the *Telegraph* (December, 1842) Gutzkow wrote a short review of *Genoveva*, commenting on its beauties of language, originality of conception, and the sharpness of characterization in the servant scenes, but calling attention to such defects as

the rôle of Margarete and her mirror, the too great prominence of Golo, and the general violence in the action. He condemned the play as a whole for lack of proportion, and described Hebbel's purpose as that of showing the lovable-ness of evil—an interpretation that exasperated the poet beyond measure. Hebbel remarked that, if such had been his purpose, he should be beheaded. Eduard Duller also wrote a highly complimentary estimate of Hebbel in his paper, while the poems were very favorably reviewed by Wilibald Alexis, in January, 1843. Thus by the close of 1842 Hebbel had definitely entered the literary arena.

CHAPTER VI

THE WIDENING SPHERE: COPENHAGEN, PARIS, A MIDDLE-CLASS TRAGEDY

"THE Dervish says that life is a journey. He might have said that journeying is life." These words of Hebbel expressed his longing for a wider acquaintance with the world. In reading Byron's works, he envied the English poet his freedom of movement. He could not endure the thought of spending his days in Hamburg, a city he never liked, in a continual struggle for a bare existence. In spite of the urging of his publisher, the shrewd Campe, that he be less abrupt and form more literary connections, and in spite of his own desire to do so, he remained alone. He had definitely broken off his relation with Amalia Schoppe soon after the completion of *Judith*. His so-called *Memorial* to her is one of the sharpest documents that he ever wrote, and it can be explained only by the severe provocations to which their relation, for the time at least no longer tenable, had subjected him. Finally, when in May, 1842, a large part of Hamburg burned down, Hebbel found no further attraction there. As sensitive as he was on the score of Elise Lensing's good name, he could not resolve to marry her. He persuaded himself that he could best serve the interests of mother and child by seeking to establish his own existence more firmly. With this object in view he turned his eyes to Copenhagen.

Schleswig-Holstein was at that time a Danish province, and Hebbel a Danish subject. The kings of Denmark had more than once favored German men of letters, and this gave Hebbel double reason for hope. Christian VIII. had come to the throne in 1839, and at that time Hebbel had applied to the influential Danish poet, Adam Oehlenschläger, with the purpose of securing one of the academic degrees that he had supposed would be bestowed on such an occasion. He de-

sired the degree of doctor of philosophy and, as an ultimate goal, a professorship of literature in the University of Kiel. To the title of "doctor" he attached great weight, as a title. When he wished to make a particular impression on his correspondent, he already signed his name as Dr. Friedrich Hebbel, as in letters to his old friend, Voss, in Wesselburen, or to Hauff, editor of the *Morgenblatt*. And even ten years later, in a sketch of his life for Brockhaus, he upheld the fiction of his "graduation" in Munich, and that at a time when he had actually received the title of "doctor" from Erlangen.

Nothing had come of his first petition, as no degrees were bestowed. But Hebbel did not give up his idea of a professorship. He now stood before the world in a different position from that of two years before, and he determined to visit Copenhagen in order to interview the King in person. As usual, one thing was lacking—money. In September, 1842, Rousseau's father lent him a considerable sum, which enabled him to carry out his plan. He left Hamburg the following month, passing through Kiel, which he hoped would be the scene of his future activities. Arrived in Copenhagen, he did not immediately visit Oehlenschläger, because, as he characteristically observed, he was not in the habit of calling on literary celebrities, preferring to be thrown in their company by chance. From a Hamburg acquaintance, a certain Count Moltke, he had received letters of introduction, among them one to a brother, Karl Moltke, a man, as Hebbel said, of considerable influence. He found that it would be a comparatively simple matter to gain access to the King, but he purposely delayed the audience until assured that copies of his writings had been placed in the royal hands. Unless these should make some unusual impression, he felt that he had no claims to consideration.

In the meantime he passed through some instructive experiences. It is particularly interesting to observe what happened when Hebbel came in touch with an element of life hitherto entirely foreign to him, though one he was to know more about in the future course of his life. The brick-mason's son in court circles—such is the picture we see here. Not the ordinary son of a brick-mason, but a man of genius,

proud, sensitive, fully conscious of his essential superiority, yet hedged in at every step by the incomprehensible magic of forms. With unconscious poetic instinct he has immortalized himself in this situation. His Copenhagen letters are works of art.

As we have seen, Hebbel was almost entirely unused to society. He had lived practically alone. Janinski, a Pole, his chief associate in Hamburg, had encouraged him in his "elegant isolation," while Elise had been his social guide. On December 7th he was invited to dinner at the home of Count Moltke. His description of that occasion completely fulfills his own demands on comedy, in so far as what was very serious for the actor is very amusing to the spectator. "If a man relates his triumphs," so he writes Elise, "he must also give an account of his defeats. This dinner turned out as usual, that is most wretchedly as far as my behavior went. I am exceedingly dissatisfied with myself. Like a pendulum swinging between the right thing and the wrong thing—not even a son of nature, for his security lies in his ignorance; still less a man who shows that he has read a book on etiquette; a strange piece on the chess-board, which is always in the way, and which the most skillful player doesn't know what to do with. . . . No, I shall never learn the tricks of this game, and that is a great misfortune, for I recognize more and more that so much depends on the outward impression one makes. The Count and his wife were nice and attentive to me. More so at first than later, and I found that very natural, for my embarrassment, my ignorance of social forms, is too noticeable. For example . . . I don't know at all whether I should pay a call after a dinner. . . . There is no one here whom I can ask about it, and before I can get an answer from you, the time will be long past." After a few sentences asking Elise's pardon for dwelling on such a disagreeable subject, and cursing his own fate, he continues: "As long as I was alone with my host and hostess, matters went very well, but when the others came, one Privy Councilor and nobleman after the other, they were all acquainted and began to flock together. The conversation, the only thing in which I am at some ease, turned on

the most particular interests . . . and I stood as if on an island, with everything sailing past me. The Countess introduced me to a Mr. von Bülow, who pretended to have read me and about me long ago. At the table I sat between a Privy Councilor Dumreicher and a somebody else. When I can sit down I am a man again, as you know, and I got on fairly well, conversing and debating with the one on Homer, with the other on gambling. But when we arose I got everything mixed up, making my bows to six persons and forgetting four. You may think—and quite truly—that they could just as well have bowed to me, but among those I forgot were two or three gentlemen from the government offices, and they have more to do with filling the Kiel professorship than the King. . . . Besides, out of vexation with myself, I did not half satisfy my hunger, and gave two marks tip . . . for which I can get an excellent dinner here. Another fine trick was my failure to bow to Mr. von Bülow when we broke up. And this although I talked to him up to the last, and he offered me his services, as well as expressing a desire for further acquaintance—whereupon I offered him my card. Was that stupid?"

Equally interesting are the letters in which Hebbel tells of the hours spent in the company of Oehlenschläger and Thorwaldsen. He never had reason to regret the visit he finally paid to Oehlenschläger, half, as he said, from ennui, and half because it once happened to be convenient when he was dressed. Besides being the most famous poet in Denmark, and the author of *Correggio*, a drama composed in German and widely read in Germany, Oehlenschläger was professor of esthetics in the University of Copenhagen. He had frequently occupied the position of rector there, and finally he had been made privy councilor. When Hebbel met him, he was sixty-three years of age. "Not deep," said Hebbel, "but responsive." "He was cordial beyond measure, so much so that it aroused my astonishment, but touched me deeply at the same time." In Hebbel's eyes his evident vanity was a thousand times overbalanced by the frankness and generosity of his feelings. With Oehlenschläger, versed as he was in German literature, former friend and constant

admirer of Goethe, a personal acquaintance, in his younger days, of the Jena Romanticists, Hebbel could converse without reserve or restraint. The older poet became an appreciative reader of what the younger had written, though some of it was, as we can well understand, a shock to him. "To you," he said to Hebbel, "I use the words Goethe used to me: 'You are a poet.'"

The most cordial relationship was soon established between these two, and in this way Hebbel gained access to Thorwaldsen's studio. Here for the first time he had an opportunity to see a great artist at work. "I asked him," writes the poet, "whether he had every statue standing clear in his mind's eye before beginning to work. He replied yes, and that he took good pains not to begin until that was the case. Certain details might receive more or less emphasis in the course of the work, but the main thing must be there at the start. I was glad to hear this, for this is the way I produce, and I cannot imagine any other method." Personally he conducted Hebbel to see his finest works—the Venus, the Graces, the Ganymede. "Who," exclaims the poet, "can speak worthily of such works? So much is certain, that he who has not seen such masterpieces of sculpture with his own eyes knows nothing of beauty." Among the immediate visible effects of this visit were the verses entitled *Thorwaldsen's Ganymede*.

We are also given a good view of Thorwaldsen's personal peculiarities. The venerable sculptor had a "face and a figure like Jupiter; like a parent god he wandered about among all his divine creations." "I found him modelling, in his underclothes, with woolen stockings drawn up over his knees and a heavy fur cap on his head. In this negligee he receives everybody, man or woman, rich or poor—it is all the same to him." The most famous sculptor in Europe, he had not learned to read better than a seven-year-old child. Though wealthy, he never spent over fifty cents for dinner, and accepted invitations only in order to save that. This last trait touched Hebbel deeply. "In this," he says, "I see nothing but the curse of his poverty when he was young, which did not even permit him to wear shirts or buy a comb.

. . . When a man has been the servant of money he rarely becomes its master."

In the meantime Hebbel had had his first audience with the King. On being informed by von Levetzow that the King had read his works in part, he requested that an audience be arranged, and this took place on Monday, December 11, 1842. If he had taken a stenographic report of the conversation Hebbel could not have given a more circumstantial account of it than he does. He particularly emphasizes his own calmness. "I am going to see a man," he says. "I shall meet him alone, not in a large company, and it is a matter of words, not of bows." This interview is characteristic, as far as Hebbel is concerned, down to its last detail. We know it is true, because it is consistent—it reflects the whole Hebbel, and the past that made him what he was. As everywhere else, so in the presence of the King he is punctilious in asserting the precise limits of his rights and his aspirations. Somehow he manages to do the greater part of the talking, and in one place at least there is an amusing rhetorical tone to his speech. Only on one condition—such are his own words—can he express his wishes, this condition being that his works have made more than the ordinary impression on the King. "For if that were not the case," he continues, "I should be merely adding another zero to the hundreds that press to the throne, and if I am not too proud for that I am at least too wise for it." He would like to read his *Judith* to the King, but the latter replies that he can read it alone just as well. The Kiel vacancy was a matter of doubt, and even if it should occur the King already had some one in view. Hebbel knew this beforehand, so he confined his petition to the privilege of becoming a *privatdozent* without examination. It is doubtful whether he would have used this privilege had it been granted. At any rate he was referred, with encouraging words, to the proper governmental department. Then, without any connection, Christian VIII. said to the poet: "Your *Judith*, however, cannot be played. I have talked with the theater-director about it. It is impossible." To this Hebbel replied that *Judith* had already been given in Berlin and Hamburg. "But there are horrible

things in it," said the King. "Your Majesty means," answered the poet, "that there are unusual things in it, things that in ordinary convention are considered improper." The King: "Yes, yes." Hebbel: "They were left out of the stage-version." The King: "You see! They were left out! But I could not know that when I read it." Hebbel: "That is true." The King: "No doubt it is one thing to write a play to be read, and another to write one for acting." Hebbel: "It should not be, but as times now are it no doubt is." Here a pause ensued, and in order to anticipate the motion of the King's hand, the customary sign of dismissal, the poet bowed and took his leave.

His original plan thus being fruitless, Hebbel was uncertain as to remaining in Copenhagen any longer. His circumstances were as straitened as possible. "Yesterday," he writes, "I performed an heroic deed and bought a loaf of bread." Upon Oehlenschläger's insistence, however, he decided to apply for a traveling pension, a common form of aid to literary men who enjoyed the favor of the government in Denmark. Hebbel yielded to this advice, and Oehlenschläger, in a personal letter to the King, warmly recommended his young friend for such a distinction. There was a second audience with Christian. The decision was postponed for several months. Hebbel spent, in the meantime, a dreary winter in his unheated quarters, and found himself at last the victim of a severe attack of rheumatism, which made him turn over to the apothecary and the doctor everything he had saved on fuel. But in April the end of his sickness was doubly brightened by the definite news that his petition had been granted. He was to receive six hundred reichsthaler each year for two years. The poet could scarcely contain his joy. "Does it not sound fabulous? . . . Friedrich Hebbel and twelve hundred reichsthaler! Who would have thought that these could ever meet? It is a greater wonder than that of Mahomet and the mountain." With double satisfaction he thought of the impression his success would make on the doubting friends in Hamburg, and especially back in Wesselburen, on the "rude mob" that had "sinned against" his youth. And at the same time Campe

wrote that his firm, as a matter of course, would publish whatever the poet saw fit to write in the future. From the same source came substantial aid in the shape of money advanced on work promised.

In Copenhagen Hebbel wrote little. A few poems, none of which satisfied his highest demands, a brief but weighty essay on the drama, published by Hauff in the *Morgenblatt*, in January, 1843, and one act of his next tragedy, *Clara*, or *Mary Magdalene*, as he unfortunately rechristened it—these were the fruits of his six months' stay in Denmark. He found that his literary reputation had preceded him, especially among the younger poets, who were passing his works around from hand to hand. This seemed to him a good sign, and all the more so because the German literary journals were acting as if every one else were "an Apollo, and he alone a Marsyas." Much of this neglect, however, he attributed to his own conduct. Over and over again he recorded his view, that he had done wrong in not making greater efforts to placate the literary powers. Now he was willing, at least he thought he was, to see more good in them. In general, so he writes his friend, Janinski, his attitude to the world had changed. He realized that he must concede the world greater rights and himself fewer. To this standpoint, which was, he thought, in accord with his own original nature, he now meant to return, after having gone to the opposite extreme.

Therefore with excellent intentions and better prospects than ever before, Hebbel left Copenhagen on April 27, 1843, for Hamburg, his plans still indefinite. One thing he knew, however—that he would leave his native country for Paris as soon as possible. Continued sickness and various personal matters delayed his departure, so that he did not reach Paris, or rather Saint Germain en Laye, until September. For it was there that he had engaged a room during the first month, with the idea of saving rent, and under the wrong impression that Paris would be easily accessible on foot. This mistake cost him practically the first month.

"Life is deep solitude," says Hebbel in one of his poems, and his own life exemplifies the saying. In spite of his good intentions, he remained isolated in Paris, as he had been

isolated hitherto. His inability to speak French, his poverty, and his disposition all tended to the same end. In Paris, again, he found one friend and admirer who became his chief associate. This was Felix Bamberg, a young Jew, who in his turn exercised some influence over the poet. Bamberg gives the following description of Hebbel at that time: "Hebbel was slender and rather tall. His bodily structure, being too slim, seemed to have suffered for the sake of his head. From beneath his high forehead, which was as if chiseled in transparent marble, his blue eyes shone with a mild light in quiet conversation, but assumed, when he was aroused, a dark and liquid radiance. Nose and mouth indicated a strong appeal of the senses. His cheeks were rather pale, just touched with red. These, together with a prominent chin, gave a certain breadth to his manly face, and in looking at him, one had the impression of light. He had the aristocratic hand of an artist, and an expressive voice, which could change from pleasant to powerful tones according to the contents of his speech. . . . A natural eloquence, which always went to the heart of the matter, and a religious earnestness characterized him."¹ This confirms Oehlen-schläger's impression, as well as that of many others, that Hebbel's conversation was characterized by a persuasive and overwhelming eloquence. The same quality is evident in his writings.

As early as December, 1843, Hebbel completed his next drama, *Mary Magdalene*. He had carried this work in his mind for years. As frequently happened in his case, the outlines became clearer during a severe illness, this time in Copenhagen, and the first act was practically complete when he went to Paris. There, rapid and successful work was interrupted by the news of the death of his little boy, Max. The child had passed away after terrible suffering from an attack of brain-fever, "tormented," as the poet says, "by two privileged murderers," meaning the physicians. One of these, a Dr. Kramer, had been rude to Elise Lensing as well, so that Hebbel longed for immortality, if only to render his

¹ Article in the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*.

name infamous forever. The name stands out in bold English type on the page of the poet's *Diary*, who thus branded the physician at the same time as he gave expression to his own grief. This *Diary* entry, consisting of several pages, is in every way a remarkable document. It is as if every curtain were withdrawn, allowing us to see the stream of consciousness surge past. No one but a poet could make such a self-revelation. The subconscious life is bared as fully as in the unrestrained coherence of some well-interpreted dream. The thoughts think themselves in a storm. The father must record that he had not unreservedly loved his son, that he had thought of him as an additional burden, that a dozen wretched considerations had prevented him from clasping his boy, and Heaven with him, joyously to his heart. This is the burden of his cry. The tragic poet, he who sat in judgment on Siegfried in *Genoveva*, now felt the breath of tragedy in his own life.

Thus he is tormented to the verge of madness. But what he once said of his letters is equally true of such passages in his *Diary*—they are silhouettes of his soul. The inner tranquillity, which he at first condemned as indifference and coldness, returned to his spirit, and he began, both in letters and verses, to console the mother for her loss. Certainly no more remarkable lines were ever written for such an occasion than those to Elise, entitled *The Departed Child to His Mother*, Christmas, 1843. That the poet gained comfort from these reflections, or deepest thoughts and divinations, as he termed them, and that he expected the heartbroken woman in Hamburg to do the same, there can be no doubt. In this poem the child speaks. The message which this departed and now blessed spirit brings is, in general, as follows: Do not resent the primeval powers, which, enthroned above all time, grasp every destiny in their firm control. The world is struggling back from the gloom and oppression of manifold forms to its original transfiguring unity. Only when the last creature realizes this process can the work be completed. And then we shall know why this division occurred. Perhaps it was in order to let evil recognize its own impotence through the full exertion of its powers, or per-

haps God could not become conscious except through forms, as man becomes conscious in language. Whatever the secret may be, the struggle produced by hate and defiance in this life is only the prelude to a higher harmony.

Thus Hebbel sunk his individual grief in the woe of the world, and it came to him as a revelation of a woman's heart that Elise was unable to follow his example. These were the harassing conditions under which he completed his *Mary Magdalene*, that is, wrote the last two scenes, for everything else was finished. This play differs from his two earlier tragedies, in that it deals with contemporary society. In a sense, it is the first of that long line of plays debating social conditions, which have been made familiar to all the world by modern writers from Ibsen to Brioux. Hebbel at once claimed a new place for his tragedy. His predecessors in middle-class tragedy, he declared, had shown a conflict between upper and middle class, whereas in his drama the conflict arises out of the middle class itself. This class is thus no longer praised as the bulwark of virtue. On the contrary its ideals are questioned or denied. Hebbel's characterization of his new play is true in this respect, though he was unjust in his criticism of his predecessors, particularly Lessing and Schiller. The class conflict as they treated it was a real conflict. But different times had brought different problems, and Hebbel was the first writer of middle-class tragedy to recognize them. It was his distinct service to rescue the *bourgeois* play from the condition of trivial comedy, or outworn tragic conflict, and elevate it once more to the dignity of real tragedy. He did this by showing the tragic aspects of narrow social convention in the middle class. The villain disappears, and all persons are equally right—and equally wrong. A social order that seems to be immovably fixed suddenly discovers elements within itself that portend its destruction.

An episode in Hebbel's life in Munich furnished him many suggestions for the new drama. There he had lived on terms of intimacy with a young girl named Josepha Schwarz, whom he called Beppi. Her father was a cabinet-maker, and something of a domestic tyrant. His name was Anton. He had

a son of a frivolous disposition named Karl, whom Hebbel saw arrested in the house during his stay there. The poet was touched by the sigh of relief that Beppi breathed when she saw that Karl's arrest would make no difference in their relation. On one occasion Beppi told Hebbel of an affair she had had with a former lover, and when he, like the Secretary in his drama, was unable for the moment to suppress his dismay, she went home and attempted to poison herself. His brief note on this relation shows how deeply he felt the sadness of her life.

It is interesting to see what he made of these particular experiences in his tragedy. The story centers around the cabinet-maker, Anton, and his family, consisting of his wife, his daughter, Clara, and his son, Karl. The more modest the circle, the greater would be the merit in revealing the universal qualities of human nature in it—such was Hebbel's idea. Clara is engaged to the pusillanimous Cashier, Leonhard, though she really loves a Secretary with whom she played in her childhood. But he has gone off to the universities and apparently forgotten her. Her friends ridicule her for having aspired to a marriage above her station; her mother urges her not to reject Leonhard, who is considered a fair match; she is angered at the Secretary's treatment of her, that is, unconsciously jealous, and so, to make an end of the whole thing, she commits the fatal mistake and consents. Now the Secretary returns and Leonhard grows jealous. His financial situation does not permit of immediate marriage, though it promises to do so in a short time. But in that interval he might lose Clara, with her dowry, so he takes advantage of a custom not uncommon in their class, and demands that she show her complete confidence in him by becoming his wife in fact before marriage. "If she really means to marry me, she knows she is risking nothing. If she says No, then—" Such is his reasoning, and in this lies his whole character. And he really intends to marry her.

All this occurs before the opening of the drama, and is brought out in an analytic exposition. Leonhard's good intentions are not shattered, though shaken by the discovery that Clara's father has given away her dowry in order to

save an old friend. In the meantime, however, her brother, Karl, is imprisoned on an unfounded charge of theft, by a bailiff whom Anton had once insulted, and who has long been waiting for a chance to get revenge. The shock of this disgrace causes the death of Clara's mother, and also gives Leonhard a good excuse to desert her, which he does in order to marry the richer, though deformed, daughter of the mayor.

The cabinet-maker, a conscientious, bigoted tyrant in his home, readily believes in the guilt of his son, whose laxity about church-going and some other matters has always been a source of worry to him. Doubly embittered by his wife's death and his son's disgrace, he regards Clara with suspicion not altogether uncalled for by her actions upon learning of Leonhard's desertion. He vows that if any irregularity should be discovered on her part he will take his own life, a vow that Clara is fully convinced he will keep. Her former lover, the Secretary, now reenters her life to sue for her hand, and from her desperate conversation he guesses the true state of her affairs. At this point Karl's innocence is completely established and he is released from prison. Clara makes a final effort to induce Leonhard to marry her, though she now loathes him. His refusal is given in such a manner as to be a genuine relief to her. For the first time she sees him in his full worthlessness. Death seems to her a release. She sees no other way of escape and therefore takes her own life. Hoping even to the last to spare the feelings of her father, she does this in a way that might seem to be accidental. It is true, a girl living nearby claims to have seen Clara spring into the well, but Anton, in an effort to save appearances at any cost, refuses to believe this. He is not allowed, however, to escape in this way. Clara's sacrifice is in vain. The Secretary, who has fought a duel with Leonhard and killed him, himself receiving a fatal wound, makes use of his last conscious moments to hold up the mirror of truth to Anton, to himself, to the whole social order of which they are a part. If Anton, he says in effect, had been a human father, if he had been a human lover, the tragedy would never have occurred. They had allowed narrow prejudice to turn them

into persecutors and murderers of an unfortunate girl. The drama closes with Anton's memorable words: "I no longer understand the world."

Mary Magdalene is in three acts, is written in prose, and, in the terseness of its action, resembles *Judith* rather than the more diffuse *Genoveva*. The scene shifts four times, between a room in Anton's house and a room at Leonhard's. The time occupied by the action is a little over a week. The first scene of this work is an excellent example of Hebbel's skill in exposition, in seizing the chief moment and unfolding its implications in many directions. We have the general situation, the characters and their attitude to life presented at comparative length, and we are nearly through the first act before becoming aware of the particular problem about which everything is going to center. Then with overwhelming suddenness at the end of that act, the poet draws the consequences of his careful exposition. The analytic nature of his method, in its similarity to the tragedy of the Greeks, was duly observed by Friedrich Theodor Vischer. It is needless to remark what use Ibsen later made of this style of exposition.

The tragedy in this drama arises from narrowness and bigotry. No character escapes blame, the responsibility falls upon them all, and in all it centers upon their deadening conventions. It is interesting to review them from this standpoint. Master Anton is a man of originally deep feelings, but his experiences with the world have been bitter and have embittered him. He is ashamed of his tender feelings, and he so effectually conceals them beneath a harsh exterior, purposely assumed, that his daughter cannot penetrate to them. He is a moral rigorist, his standard is inflexible down to the slightest detail. Conscientious in the extreme, he finally falls into that fatal conception of honor and disgrace which makes a man the slave of what people will say and think. In his own home he is a tyrant, disregarding the personal rights of his family. He even carries his petty regulations to the extreme of prescribing a certain peg for each particular garment. This course leads him into a confusion of moral values; he cannot distinguish between the

essential and the non-essential, between the human and the conventional. He is therefore unable to retain the love and respect of his son, the very ties by which he might have influenced him for good. He has no sympathy with him, no comprehension of him, and from slight errors he reasons at once to the enormity of theft. In the same way he is inaccessible to Clara. He cannot show her the love he feels for her. If he had given her the slightest sign of sympathy, the tragedy might not have happened. His uncompromising attitude drives her to extremes. Yet, in many respects, he is an excellent man. He gives up all his savings to rescue the honor of an old friend. He is a conscientious workman, and, in his way, a loving husband and father. In fact, in the eyes of many he is a model citizen. It is just this that makes Hebbel's delineation of him so effective.

Though the mother dies early in the drama, we have a clear conception of her position and character. She is the chief sufferer from her husband's despotic regime, by which she has been completely subdued and moulded to his manner of thinking. She does her duty as he sees it. But for the necessity her heart imposes upon her of standing between him and her children, she would have preserved no trace of independence. She is always on the defensive in behalf of Karl, who, for his part, is pathetically indifferent to the devotion thus centered upon him.

Clara, again, must be accused at the same tribunal. Under the strong pressure of gossip and other inadequate motives, she engages herself to a man whom she does not love. Intensifying this wrong, but not changing its quality, she yields herself to him before marriage, because nothing else will satisfy him of her real intentions. She is not worse than others. Indeed, she is better and more sincere than most women would have been, inasmuch as she cannot deceive the Secretary when the opportunity presents itself. She is capable of the highest generosity, sacrificing her youth and beauty to spare the feelings of her father. Like the others she is a victim of social prejudice, and we pity her most because of her inexperience, her helplessness, her inability to defend herself against circumstances.

The Secretary shares with Clara the truest sense of humanity. In two ways he was at fault. By his protracted silence he was responsible for Clara's engagement to Leonhard. And when he heard her confession his impulse prompted him to use words that could but intensify her despair, "No man can get over that." It is true he quickly repents of those words. This attitude is only of a moment's duration. He intends to marry Clara, in spite of everything she has done, but—not until Leonhard is disposed of. This is also a prejudice.

In Karl we see a decided reaction against a false standard.² In spite of his frivolity we can comprehend him. His instincts lead him to break away from his surroundings. He is the adventuresome element in life. Even the purposeless, roving existence of a seaman appears better to him than the narrow security of his home. But his frivolity is fatal. Though he is innocent, he puts himself in the way of suspicion, and his arrest is the initial cause of the tragedy in the form it assumes.

Hebbel asserted that all the characters in his play were right, even Leonhard. Leonhard was not meant to be a villain upon whom evil is heaped for the purpose of making a conflict. This fact has been shown sufficiently by our analysis of the other persons in the drama. But even considered by himself, Leonhard is, unfortunately, quite human. Bamberg, to whom Hebbel first read *Mary Magdalene*, at once penetrated into this character, so that the poet quotes his words with full approval: "Concerning Leonhard, he (Bamberg) made the very true remark that he was by no means repulsive, because he was naive. This had escaped me, but it is true. This rogue acts not on principle, but according to his innermost nature. One is not vexed with him, but with God for making him."³ If we wish to relieve Leonhard of personal responsibility for being repulsive, we can do it in this way, and that is no doubt what Bamberg

² This is Bamberg's view, in opposition to Fr. Th. Vischer, and it is no doubt correct. Reaction against domestic tyranny may very well take the form Hebbel gives it in Karl.

³ Letter to Elise, December 5, 1843.

meant. Society is also responsible for him and his way of thinking, for Society not only tolerates him, but stamps him with official approval. It is a stifling moral atmosphere where Leonhards can thrive.

Naturally enough, the point around which *Mary Magdalene* revolves—Clara's relation to Leonhard—has, from Hebbel's day to this, been severely criticised. Leonhard's character makes the occurrence hard to accept. In addition to what has already been said concerning Clara's motives in this case, the following seems worthy of consideration. Clara does not know Leonhard in the beginning as she knows him, and as we know him, at the end. It is a keen insight into human nature, or such human nature, that Hebbel does not allow Leonhard to show his real self until he is assured of possessing Clara. Up to this time the young and inexperienced girl had only a superficial knowledge of him. Anton wrongly kept his judgment of Leonhard to himself. In the first conversation between Clara and Leonhard after her fatal error, she learns more of him in two minutes than in all their previous acquaintance. We can feel the terror growing in her heart as she realizes that she is bound to this man. As a motive, on the other hand, Leonhard's demand is little less interesting than her consent. He himself assigns jealousy as the reason, meaning jealousy of Clara and her dowry. Not of her dowry alone—her beauty counts for something. In his mind amatory and financial considerations form a strange mixture. It is very instructive to follow his self-justification for every step he takes. He is a more energetic, a more cunning Ichabod Crane. He characteristically rejoices in his own subtleties, and as a swindler he is an amateur who has in him the making of a professional.

Thus the more closely one examines this danger point in the drama, the more finely woven is the web of motives about it found to be. And yet Hebbel soon discovered that this very situation between Clara and Leonhard was a stone of stumbling both to critics and theater directors. "My drama is perfectly adapted to the stage. If they won't give that, then I don't know the reason." Such were his words in a letter to Elise, immediately after having completed his new

drama. Groaning over "the outrageous postage," he sent his manuscript to Madam Stich-Crelinger. In her reply she spoke in the highest terms of Hebbel's poetic talent, commenting especially on his improvement in stage technique, from which she inferred that he had frequented the theater more diligently in the meantime. "This," says the poet in his answer, "must lie in the unconscious development of my talent, for I have not been in the theater five times since *Judith* was written." But in the main question, that of the drama being given, her opinion was unfavorable, because of the theme discussed in it. Negotiations were kept up until May 16, 1844, when the poet received definite notice of the refusal of his work in Berlin. He resolved to have it published. Cotta, the aristocratic Swabian firm, whose name was a guarantee in itself, and whom Hebbel at different times approached in vain, declined to consider the new work, just as if he had "been knocking at the publishers' doors for the first time." Campe, however, agreed to publish the drama, and it appeared in September, 1844, with a dedication to Christian XIII. of Denmark, and, what was more important, provided with a preface, a sort of manifesto of Hebbel's dramatic theory. Into the nature of this latter it is now time to enquire.

CHAPTER VII

TWO ESSAYS ON THE THEORY OF THE DRAMA

THE complete edition of Hebbel's works by Professor R. M. Werner comprises twelve volumes of the works proper, four volumes of the *Diary*, and eight volumes of *Letters*. The works proper contain fourteen dramas and important dramatic fragments, a large number of poems, and a number of stories. Besides these works, we find several theoretical essays on the drama, and on language, and many critical reviews, as well as a considerable part devoted to impressions of travel or contemporary events. Hebbel's productions, therefore, fall naturally into a practical and a theoretical group, while in the *Letters*, and more especially in the *Diary*, we have a fund of personal comment, which serves to illuminate the works proper. The *Diary* alone assumes great importance, embodying in direct quotation, or otherwise, much of what is contained in the *Letters*, and constituting, in the opinion of some critics, Hebbel's chief claim to immortality. Though this is hardly the case, his *Diary* is one of the most interesting documents in German literature.

Many writers on Hebbel put the following questions: What is text, and what is glossary? Are the dramas so much illustrative material to establish and explain the theory? Or, on the other hand, is the theory an attempt, perfect or imperfect, to interpret the dramas? This, however, is obviously not the only way to formulate the case. The dramas and the theory may have independent values. The theory may be true, even if the dramas fail to illustrate it, and the dramas may be good, though they fail to illustrate the theory. Or they would be good, if the theory is true, and they do illustrate it. If it is a question of deciding, as it really is, whether Hebbel is primarily a poet or a speculative thinker, we must decide unhesitatingly for the first.

Much of his theory is purely practical, dealing with aspects of his art of which a poet could scarcely be unconscious. The metaphysical implications of his theory, which with all their contradictions have been drawn for him by Arno Scheunert, he never fully realized, nor were they able, while threatening the variety and spontaneity of his creations, to drown the voices of his native genius.

The problem just stated is not the only one in this difficult chapter on Hebbel. The whole subject swarms with problems. Whether his theory is original or borrowed from the absolute philosophy of his time (Schelling, Solger, Hegel)—whether his dramas are in accord with his theory or not, yes, even what his theory is—such are the most interesting questions. Widely divergent views are held concerning them all. The following discussion proposes to do three things: first, to give a brief outline of Hebbel's two main essays on the drama; second, to point out the relationship between these views and the three philosophers above named; and, finally, to indicate the two most authoritative and representative interpretations of the theory among the present German critics of the poet. Each of these divisions must be treated with the utmost conciseness. The other important question, as to the relation between Hebbel's theory and his dramas, cannot be discussed to advantage until all the dramas have been outlined. An attempt to answer this will be made near the end of the volume.

An immediate statement of the contents of the first essay would only confuse a reader unfamiliar with Hebbel's modes of thought. It is, therefore, necessary to lead up to that point by degrees. In a letter to one of his friends, Hebbel made a confession, which was literally true, and which may be considered characteristic of his entire mode of thought. He said that from his youth he had had the habit of seeing in things not the things themselves, but symbols of nature or history. This is another way of stating that demand which, as we have seen, was the first demand he made of all art: that, through the finite, it reveal the infinite. "The poet is always in relation to the infinite, and in every work the genius makes an anagram of creation" (May, 1837).

"Philosophy is always concerned with the Absolute, and that is after all really the task of poetry" (September, 1837). When Hebbel considers a theme, he instinctively enquires into its "symbolic" elements. The story of Joan of Arc symbolizes the individual being sacrificed to divine need. The same is true, as we have seen, of *Judith*. And *Genoveva* was intended to symbolize the atoning power of pure virtue. As early as 1835, in a paper read before the Club in Hamburg, he clearly outlined his high conception of art. Poetry "must lay hold of and present life in all its various forms. That this is not merely a copying is self-evident. . . . What we desire to see is the point from which life begins, and that at which, as a single wave, it is lost again in the great sea of infinite creation."

First, therefore, art is a symbolic presentation of life. And second, art for Hebbel means literature, and literature means above all else the drama. Hence his thought turns about the problem of character. Man stands in the center of his reflections. "What makes tragedy is man's struggle, not the result of that struggle." This struggle of man is a symbol for him of the whole process of life. The drama he chose, even as early as 1835, by which to illustrate his views, shows us, moreover, the specific nature of man's struggle. It was the *Prince of Homburg*, by Heinrich von Kleist. Its central theme Hebbel then formulated as follows: "Power stands above the law, and courage recognizes no boundaries but itself." Kleist's drama, of course, shows the futility of that proposition. The respective rights of the individual and the state, as embodied here in law—such was the problem that interested the youthful Hebbel in his criticism. He made it the basis, in one form or another, of all his work. So much for the general subject of tragedy. From a practical standpoint, one other consideration. Only in his growth is man a subject of tragedy. "The first and last object of art is to represent the life-process itself, to show how man's inner nature unfolds within its surrounding atmosphere, whether that is suitable to him or not. To show how good in him produces evil, and this in turn something better, and that this

process . . . in reality has no end—such is symbolism” (February, 1839).

The poet, who would otherwise not be a dramatic poet at least, regards this struggle of man now from the individual's point of view, and now from the opposite direction. The individual must exert his powers until they meet resistance. That is a law of his being. That contingency, however, is certain. For human life is a conflict, the whole of it is a warfare, more or less tenacious as the case may be. “What we call life is the presumption of a part over against the whole.” All general forces at once attempt to destroy anything particular, either during its formation or thereafter (Jan., 1842).

That is, briefly, in Hebbel's view life is tragedy. To use a word applied to his philosophy by one of his German critics, he considers life as a pan-tragic process. This sounds quite pessimistic, and Hebbel was not blind to this fact. His attitude is that of a man reconciling himself as best he can with a reality that he cannot change. He does not doubt the reality. Sometimes he states all the implications of his theory with an unpleasant frankness. In discussing his *Judith*, he declares: “All tragedy lies in destruction and proves nothing but the emptiness of existence” (July, 1841). Or one year later: “I am thinking much about what reviewers call reconciliation in tragedy. There is no reconciliation. The heroes fall because they are overweening” (July, 1842). In vain his mind seeks some comfort, some resting point in this conception, which his nature and his observation force upon him. “I ask: Why this overweening pride? To what end this curse of power? Only if it were thereby elevated, really ennobled, could I be reconciled to it. And yet, one could still ask: Why is this gradation necessary? Why this ascending line, in which every advance must be won by such unspeakable pains?” In Copenhagen he reads Hegel's *Esthetic*, and his mind is continually occupied with this question of reconciliation in tragedy. “Oehlenschläger wants reconciliation. So do I. But I want the reconciliation of the Idea”—here Hebbel uses the term in Hegel's sense—“he, that of the individual. As if tragedy

were possible within the limits of individual compensation!" (January, 1843).

These quotations bring us up to the publication of the first essay, *A Word about the Drama*, which appeared in Hauff's *Morgenblatt*, in January, 1843. It is characteristically brief, embracing only about seven pages. The poet had only to present, in connected form, ideas long clear in his own mind. He did this with the naive confidence of the creative spirit, and in a form unhampered, as he put it, by systematic method.

He outlines his views on the following questions: The general basis and function of the drama, the nature of tragic guilt, the relative importance of character and plot, and the relation between drama and history. In a few paragraphs at the end he discusses the state and prospects of contemporary drama in Germany.

The drama must represent the life-process in its essence. Life manifests itself in a twofold way, as static life and as growing life (Sein und Werden), in individual form (Werden), and as an "original nexus" (Sein), from which the individual has sprung. The individual, "in spite of its incomprehensible freedom," is still a part of this whole, and since its very nature is particularity, it is in a "critical relation" to the whole. It expresses its freedom in acts, but these acts are immediately "modified and transformed" by the event, which is the "expression of necessity," i. e., of the whole. The more definite and energetic these acts are, the more certain are they to be opposed by the general will.

The definition of tragic guilt grows directly out of this position. Tragic guilt is the mere self-assertion of the individual. The direction of that self-assertion, whether along the lines commonly called "good" or those called "bad," is, from the point of view of tragedy, a matter of complete indifference. Indeed the most powerful tragedy would result when the hero is destroyed in a praiseworthy undertaking. Hebbel is very emphatic on this point, which is one of the most characteristic phases of his theory. He supports his argument by his interpretation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. "Antigone wishes to perform a sacred duty

... and yet she perishes, though she violates nothing but a civil law, which in itself is not tenable and only formally represents the idea of the state."

Of the two elements, plot and character, character is by far the more important for modern drama. Witness Shakespeare's example. The dramatic characters must be shown, not as finished but changing. One character should dominate the action and be to the subordinate persons what the divine law is to him. The poetic character must be endowed with more than normal self-consciousness. This is proved by Shakespeare, and is in fact a necessary law of the drama. It is due to the limitation of art as compared with life, which is unlimited in time and means. In life action precedes words, in art words must accompany, or may even precede, action.

The relation of drama to history is another characteristic phase of Hebbel's discussion. History naturally furnishes the best material for the drama, but what makes the drama historical is not its material. Hebbel realized the complexity in fact and motive of all that happens. History, i. e. the traditional body of facts, is best described, in his opinion, by the familiar phrase that it is a fable agreed upon. It is one version of something that occurred. When he speaks, on the other hand, of history as a critique of the world spirit, he means not material history, but history properly interpreted. The dramatic poet, if worthy of the name, is a proper interpreter. Hebbel agreed with Tieck in considering Shakespeare a great historian as well as a great tragedian, and that in all his dramas. The poet is not a prophet in the valley of dry bones, he is a priest interpreting the meaning of life in symbols drawn from history.¹ He can do that by an invented subject, but it is unwise to invent subjects when those sanctioned by tradition are ready to hand. He must not be a slave of that tradition, he must correct where tradition errs. But the poet, while he is a historian in the highest sense, writes the history, not of former times but of his own. The history of Greece lives best in her tragedies, and to some distant future Shakespeare will be in the same sense the

historian of his country and his age. The poet can never give anything but himself. Yet if he does not "stubbornly creep into his own lean *ego*, but is penetrated by the invisible elements that are forever in flux," he may be sure that this self, and hence his works, will reflect his times. In order to make his dramas convincing, he must, if he choose historical material, of course represent his characters in their native atmosphere. But this is merely an indispensable law of his art, not an object in itself.

After this outline of Hebbel's views on the relation of drama to history, we can understand why he called his dramas an offering to the spirit of his age, whether he draws from Jewish or Greek tradition, whether he seeks to reconstruct the vanishing dawn of religious consciousness and the beginnings of civilization (*Moloch*), or to portray the transition of the Germanic into the Christian world (*Nibelungen*). In this sense, *Mary Magdalene* is as historical as *Judith* or *Genoveva*.

What strikes us particularly in this essay on the drama, is the stern view taken of guilt as the result of individual existence. There is no reconciliation except in the destruction of the individual existence. It is not even necessary, though better, that the individual become conscious of the process he has endured. The ordinary individual is the drop in the stream, the tragic individual is the block of ice, which must be melted down before mingling with the waters about it. Or the poet puts his idea in a different way. The individual is the defective form of the Idea, and the tragedy shows how the Idea is freed from its defective form.

From the point of view of the individual this is a hard saying. It proved too hard for the modern individualistic mind. Hebbel soon saw that the question of reconciliation was a stumbling block between himself and the public. Not only were his dramas censured for their pessimism, his theory was attacked from the same angle, as allowing the drama to close with a "dissonance." This accusation was made by Professor J. L. Heiberg, a prominent Danish critic, who attacked Hebbel with some severity, and among

other things declared him to be a philosophical bankrupt. Hebbel was not the man to accept this criticism amiably. In a sharp reply, printed by Campe in the summer of 1843, he reaffirms his position point for point, with an even more emphatic statement on reconciliation. He knew that this was the pivot of his theory. He therefore disclaims that he is advancing any new doctrine. He takes refuge with Shakespeare and the Greeks. So far from the drama, as he conceives it, ending with a dissonance, it ends, he says, with the highest harmony, it automatically destroys the dualistic form of life, "as soon as that appears too sharply." It procures satisfaction for the Idea in destroying the individual form which, by act or by existence, threatens to assume too much room for itself. This satisfaction "is now incomplete, if the individual perishes, sullen and unreconciled, . . . and now complete, if the individual gains in his death a clear view of his relation to the whole and departs in peace."

This was the best Hebbel could do. With his eyes fixed on the eternal operations of a divine law, he could not deny its existence because individuals were crushed in the process. That was what constituted him a tragedian. A tragic view of life is for most people an exalted and unsupportable vision. The poet saw in every man, and hence especially in the tragic hero, two modes of existence, the one individual and particular, expressed in his single deeds, the other universal, connecting him with the divine order. One temporal and one eternal. Death is a crucible in which the human perishes, but the divine lives. Tragedy serves the same function for its victims. It is the lightning flash that reveals in the same moment it consumes, the vision of God that is death. Its reconciliation lies in this revelation and in this vision. None other is possible, and with this we must agree in spite of the shudder that runs through us. The tragic canon he expressly adopts is found in the closing words of the chorus in *Antigone*: One must show all reverence to the gods. Haughty words of proud men are punished by overwhelming might and teach wisdom to old age.

Hebbel made no claim by this view to have banished mystery from life. On the contrary, he demanded that art should symbolize the mystery it finds in life, and thus bring life closer to our consciousness. Why the dualism, i. e. the individuation, should exist at all, is a question in which "the drama and the mystery of the world are lost in one and the same night." For "even if the rift is closed, why did the rift have to be opened? To this I have never found an answer, and no one will find it who asks seriously."

Hebbel's first essay was, after all, mainly practical. What metaphysics it contained was presented categorically, and apparently seemed to the author a matter of course. This was natural. He had no comprehensive logical system. Logical thinking was not his means of apprehending reality. He did that in good Bergsonian fashion. He is like a man uttering sentences in a dream. With remarkable persistence he comes back to the same position over and over again. If any one should take these oracular texts and weave them into a metaphysical whole, as Scheunert, for one, does, he could deny that it was of his construction. And properly so. These statements are not fragments of a logical system, but reflections of a different totality, of the same totality which is reflected in the dramas. No one has proved more clearly than Scheunert, that every attempt on Hebbel's part to round out his sayings into a connected whole involved him in hopeless contradiction.

According to Scheunert's analysis, which seems entirely sound, Hebbel's thinking was really an experiencing, and he attained his system by generalizing that experience. This is the same thing as saying he attained it by intuition. Hebbel's own experience showed him that the social order presented a solid front to all individual encroachments, that settled tradition is hostile to anything new. This conflict is a necessary one, since the existence of the social order depends on conservatism, while the individual, with equal right, asserts its particular direction. Even a superficial reading of history was sufficient to convince him that this principle ran through all human epochs, that it explained

all the martyrdoms, and that both mankind and the individual, as parties to the tragedy, were right. The next step was to assume that this process expressed a metaphysical law, and that all individual existence necessitated a continual warfare between the individuals and the "original nexus." This is what he means when he speaks of the Idea (the highest term of the absolute philosophers) on the one hand, and of the individual on the other. The Idea is manifested in the history of man and in all human institutions, and for the purpose of the dramatist, who needs something concrete, the social institutions represent the Idea, i. e., they assume, in many cases, the rôle of the conservative force, the totality, against which the individual is shattered.

These considerations will help us understand the poet's second essay on the drama, which appeared as the *Preface* to *Mary Magdalene*. According to Emil Kuh, Hebbel's decision to write this Preface was attributable to his association with Bamberg, at that time a disciple of Hegel, and it was probably confirmed by Madam Stich-Crelinger's objections to giving the drama on the stage. Hebbel seems to have been engaged on the essay as early as January, 1844, and he completed it in March of that year. Bamberg denies having influenced him. He says Hebbel was far too securely grounded to have admitted of that possibility.¹ Kuh's assertion, however, is supported by the testimony of the poet himself, at a later time, when he wished he had not written the *Preface*.

The style of the *Preface* is particularly difficult and involved. Vischer describes it as an unheard-of German. The sentences wind on interminably. Hebbel posts his main object, the central thought, half way down the page, and then begins to meander toward it through a bewildering maze of parenthetical and limiting phrases and clauses, until the reader's attention is strained to the uttermost. As for the contents, the striking thing is that the poet proclaims a new type of drama. In the first essay he had

¹ Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie.

been content to lay bare the basis of all tragedy—a basis he never deserted—and to claim kinship with Shakespeare and the Greeks. In the second essay, if he does not leave this basis, he at least attempts to erect a new structure upon it.

The new essay is best understood from two points of view. One is that of reconciliation, the other that of a defence of art against Hegel. That Hebbel was on the defensive—though of a somewhat aggressive kind, as we shall see—we know both from his own admission later, as well as from the nature of the essay itself. The reconciliation now proposed may be considered, in comparison with the former standpoint, a slight concession to the individual. For though still suffering a tragic fate, he may, provided this reaches his consciousness, draw consolation from the fact that his death is a sacrifice to a higher cause. Certainly the spectator draws this consolation. What is this higher cause? The answer to that question is the essence of the new drama.

Hebbel begins his *Preface* by saying that the drama has the task of illustrating the relation of man to the Idea. It is possible in its highest form only when some decisive change occurs in that relation. Thus far in human history only two such crises have arisen. The third is in process in our own times. The first occurred in the Greek world when the naive faith in the gods was replaced by the conception of an overwhelming fate. Greek tragedy aided in the consummation of this change by bringing it clearly to human consciousness. Here the dramatic discussion, or the tragic dualism, is between fate and man. The second crisis in man's relation to the Idea was the freeing of the individual in Protestantism, and this came best to human consciousness in Shakespeare's dramas. Here the dramatic discussion, or the tragic dualism is in the individual alone—a very doubtful statement, which seems to have become orthodox among Hebbel critics.

Only one other attitude to the Idea is possible, and that is, to place the tragic dualism in the Idea itself, or, as the poet says, in that phase of the Idea which is presented to

us. By that he means "the existing institutions of human society, political, religious and moral." These institutions represent the Idea, they symbolize the moral order of the Universe. They are the Idea in phenomenal form, and this phenomenal form may become problematical, and produce tragedy by its very mode of existence. The tragedy will then appear as a criticism of that particular form of the Idea. Thus, in his peculiar way, Hebbel laid the foundation for a drama of social criticism, or a drama of social evolution. But this drama was not to descend to the particularity of a program, and it was to be essentially conservative. Hebbel believed that his time was in the throes of a great spiritual revolution, he believed the drama should mirror this revolution. And yet his attitude was conservative. "The man of this century," he says, "does not want new and unheard of institutions, as he has been reproached with. He only wants a better foundation for those he has. He wants to see them rest on nothing but morality and necessity, which are identical."

But Hebbel made skilful use of his new point of view for another important purpose—that of defending the drama against Hegel. The question at issue was that the poet saw in poetry the highest interpretation of life, while the philosopher, admitting that poetry had once occupied that lofty position, claimed that philosophy had now taken its place. As is well known, Hegel interpreted life as a logical process. The discovery of the contradiction contained in every proposition is the road to a higher truth. We first have the thesis, the contradiction to this is the antithesis, and the higher resultant truth is the synthesis. This synthesis, in turn, becomes a new thesis, and the infinite process is continued. This process is common to life and logic. And through this process the Idea attains an ever greater degree of self-consciousness in man.

When Hebbel speaks of "debating the justification of the Idea" (*Diary*, Nov., 1843), or of showing that the contradiction is in the Idea itself (Preface), he is applying Hegel's famous method to the tragedy. That is, taking life as an evolution in Hegel's own sense, he asserts that it

is a tragical, rather than a logical, process. It can be symbolized in tragedy, but it has never been clearly conceived in philosophy. From this point he goes over to an attack on philosophy, particularly wherever it attempts to subordinate art. In this way Hebbel turned Hegel's weapons against Hegel.

The connection between this Preface and the drama it was to introduce, *Mary Magdalene*, is now plain. *Mary Magdalene*, though in no narrow sense, is a drama of social criticism. The social order which it portrays is bankrupt. The accepted representative of family and church, as then and there existing, stands at the end with the confession on his lips: I no longer understand the world. The contradiction in the Idea has been shown, and we know that a social order consisting of such self-destructive elements can no longer endure. The dramatist's task ends here. He shows us no synthesis. The new order barely shimmers in the dying words of the Secretary. Its actual constitution must be entrusted to the future. It cannot be said that Hebbel claimed, in *Mary Magdalene*, to have established the epoch-making drama of the new era, but it also cannot be denied that he at least hoped to have shown the way.

Now that we have an outline of Hebbel's thought, we may enquire into the relation between that and the philosophy of his times. All shades of opinions are held among German critics as to the degree of his dependence or independence. He himself was a stout defender of his originality in every particular, asserting that after his twenty-second year he had not added to his stock of (organic) ideas. He ridiculed that view which would refer all creative thought to some outside source, and declared it to be doubtful whether we ever adopt any thought not already potentially in our own minds. Perhaps the most questionable feature of the case is his over-sensitiveness. It has been clearly established that, in several instances, he attempted to cover up the traces of his reading in order to avoid any suspicion of borrowing. This was entirely unnecessary, as the originality of his mind is undeniable.

It seems true, as we have seen already, that the basis

of Hebbel's thinking was his own experience, and hence essentially original. But that he elevated this experience into the realm of metaphysics and escaped influence by the greatest speculative thinkers since the Greeks, is inconceivable. He came into direct touch with these systems of thought in Munich. There he heard the later, the theological Schelling, and according to Kuh was unpleasantly affected by his mystical omniscience and his ceremonial attitudes. Certain entries in his *Diary*, however, show traces of these lectures, such as his reflections on mythology as a connecting link between philosophy and religion, and philosophy and poetry. But he also read the writings of the earlier Schelling. It has been widely assumed that he found in them ideas long since expressed by him in certain poems composed between the years 1832 and 1836; particularly, existence conceived of as a state of punishment, in that it is a separation from the world-soul, a sad state of isolation to be terminated by death. The same idea is contained in the long poem of consolation, written from Paris to Elise Lensing, upon the death of their child. This poem, as we have seen, suggests two entirely different explanations of the so-called isolation, though the fact itself with its unfortunate results, is not questioned. Hebbel also believed that, before having so much as heard Schelling's name, he had written poetry embodying what he called "Schelling's principle." It has been fairly well established, however, by Zincke that only the most general similarity, if any, can be found between Schelling's and Hebbel's ideas, and that the ideas attributed to Schelling in the whole discussion are very different from those he really held. Hebbel's naive philosophy is not comparable to the highly differentiated and complex system of Schelling, and the distinction is clearly seen when it comes to precise philosophical formulation of ideas. On the other hand, it seems likely, that Zincke has gone too far in denying any similarity between the poet and the philosopher in their conception of the function of art. Hebbel's views on this question are not so narrowly esthetic as Zincke would have us believe. Like Schelling he held to the absolute valuation

of art as a revelation of the Infinite in finite form, as the test and touchstone, yes the realization of philosophy. And in Schelling's writings he found his own view confirmed, that the act of poetic creation unites in itself, at one and the same time, conscious and unconscious operations of the mind. Some similarity, also, has been discovered between Hebbel's belief, that the freedom of the individual consists in his insight into the wisdom of the inevitable, that this insight is the only possible "reconciliation" in tragedy, and Schelling's teaching on freedom and necessity.

Hebbel also read while in Munich some of the writings of Solger, including those in which Solger makes a practical application of his esthetic principles to the Greek drama. Here the essential tragic conflict is found between individual and racial will, the racial will, in its ideal aspects, mirroring the Eternal in the form of laws. It is significant that Hebbel supports his theory on Sophocles, and even more significant that the atmosphere of his tragedy is antique in its exalted severity. Solger, like Schelling, confirmed him in his high valuation of art, even going further with Hebbel in regarding the poet as a prophet burdened with a divine message which he must proclaim, whether he will or not. The poetic imagination is conceived as a direct revelation of the Universal. Solger also taught that tragedy and comedy have a common origin, and he set up the distinction between the ancient and the modern drama to which Hebbel holds in his *Preface*. Finally, Hebbel's idea of reconciliation is strikingly similar to Solger's statement of the result of a tragic action. All art gives the Idea in finite form, but is at the same time its destruction as pure form. By the destruction in turn of the finite form the pure form is restored. "In tragedy by the destruction of the individual form the Idea is revealed as existing, for by doing away with its particular manifestation it is present as Idea." This is Hebbel's lightning flash that consumes in the same moment it reveals. Thus we may say that from a concrete point of view, Hebbel found more in Solger than in Schelling, and he later referred to him with warmth as the teacher of his youth.

It is generally admitted that Hebbel's views are more closely related to the philosophy of Hegel than to any other. While in Munich he became acquainted, probably, with the *Philosophy of History*, and attempted, as he says without success, to penetrate the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*. In Copenhagen he read the *Esthetic*, and while in Paris, as we know, he associated intimately with the Hegelian, Bamberg. Hebbel borrows the use of the term *Idea* specifically from Hegel, and he also holds the same view of tragic guilt as the necessary conflict between justifiable forces. Only he places the conflict between individual and Idea, whereas Hegel places it between two elements of society, each representing the Idea, as for example between the elements of family and state in *Antigone*. And we have already seen how Hebbel adopted Hegel's own basis and method of reasoning and applied it to the new drama he proclaimed, in order to place his chosen art at the very pinnacle of the manifestations of the spirit.

From the entire foregoing discussion it is easy to see that Hebbel spoke the vocabulary of his times. His use of the *Idea*, the *Universal*, the *Individual*, of the conflict between these elements, of tragic guilt, and so forth, reminds us instantly of the thinkers by whom he was surrounded. And we shall see later that his conception of the State, as embodied in theory and practice, connects him equally as well with his generation. Therefore it has been asserted, on the basis of extended investigation, that Hebbel's entire system of "criticism and esthetics is a selection, a rounding out, and an occasional deepening, of problems of his time, undertaken by a philosophical nature." The writer of these words, however, also says that these problems have been kept alive by Hebbel, that is, he is the center of the animated discussion carried on about them at the present time. But for him and his works they would be forgotten.

There are a number of careful interpretations of Hebbel's dramatic theory in German. Perhaps the most representative of them have been written by Arno Scheunert and O. F. Walzel, in their works as already cited. Walzel confines his discussion more to the drama, while Scheunert

sets up a complete system of thought drawn from Hebbel's *Work, Letters and Diary*. This was the first attempt to establish a general system for Hebbel, and it still remains the most extensive. The underlying principle of this system is Hebbel's pantragic view of life, which, from the standpoint of the individual, is gloomy and hopeless in the extreme. It leads us into that despairing and pessimistic atmosphere which seems, in the words of the poet himself, to indicate the emptiness of all individual existence. This would form the main structure of the poet's philosophy, and result as the necessary impression from his tragedies, naively viewed. Only by occupying his metaphysical point of view could we draw a certain chill comfort from the prospects of a reunion with the Idea.

There is a truth in Scheunert's presentation that it is useless to deny. We have seen that Hebbel realized his own pessimism, which at times, especially at the beginning of his career, reduced him to despair. Those who attempt to argue away this pessimism set themselves a hard task. But it is equally true, that as he grew older he became less pessimistic. This is perfectly plain in his experience and in his works. Scheunert holds too severely to the pessimistic tone throughout Hebbel's productions. He admits in him no change, no development as a thinker, confining his development only to a freer poetic use of his philosophical ideas. But we know that Hebbel gradually lost faith in speculation, that he turned more and more to the practice of his art as his sole comfort. And here lies the trouble with Scheunert's system—it constructs the poet out of the metaphysician, instead of the metaphysician out of the poet. This is why he must protest against putting the poet Hebbel in the foreground where he certainly belongs, and this explains how he could describe Hebbel's tragic characters as grafts upon the tree of his metaphysics. For him Hebbel begins and ends as the poet not of life but of absolute philosophy.

Walzel's object is to free Hebbel from this reproach of metaphysical dogmatism, to re-establish him as a poet. He sees in him a decided development in the direction of a more

conciliatory view of life. Hebbel began with his eyes fixed on the "critical relation" between the individual and the Idea, like Solger; and, like Solger, he finds that reconciliation is in the interest of the Idea. This leads him to the view that the individual is sacrificed in order that the species may live on in better form. And here he can apply Hegel's evolutionary teaching directly to the tragedy. Later, and here Walzel adopts the conclusions reached by Anna Schapire, the poet repudiated his *Preface*, and indeed gave up all metaphysical speculation. As the basis of his tragedy, however, according to Walzel, he retained the conflict between the individual and the Universal, and the evolutionary solution of the conflict. The individual perishes for a cause that will survive. He is a martyr to the future.

In so far as this theory is supposed to be abstracted from Hebbel's later works, and therefore of course to be applicable to them, it often does violence to their spirit. When thus used, it is, like Scheunert's system, a dogmatism—a better, no doubt, but a dogmatism none the less.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TURNING POINT! PARIS, ITALY, VIENNA.

THE account of Hebbel's outward life in Paris may be disposed of briefly. It is the same story of poverty. He had, of course, to provide for the support of Elise, and a second son, who was born in May, 1844, and whom Hebbel never saw. He could not attend theaters and concerts, nor even buy decent clothes, food, and fuel. He knew little French, met none of the French celebrities, and in fact seems to have come in slight contact with French people. Heine he met, but in spite of some things in common the two men formed no real friendship. The socialist, Arnold Ruge, who gave him some insight into the world of Marx and Engels, only tended in conversation to confirm him in his belief that the socialistic movement was wrong. He placed all progress in the individual, not in the masses. The street life in Paris, the public parades, the carnivals, and the fairs, whatever cost nothing, Hebbel enjoyed fully. French vivacity and *naïveté*, in striking contrast with his phlegmatic North, was for him an excellent counterpoise to metaphysics. Like a breath of fresh air it runs through his *Diary*, that life is the main thing after all. It is that which makes him place the paintings of Vernet above those of Cornelius, it is that which he means to strive for in his own works from now on. There is noticeable in him a distinct growth in his literary consciousness.

This literary consciousness becomes keener in Paris. The opportunity he had there of surveying the world's art gave him a broader view of life as a whole than he had ever had before. He began to examine himself in relation to that. Already he had given proofs of his powers, "but the fruits," he said, "are bitter. I myself can detect in their taste the stony ground on which they grew. And I fear that this will cheat me of the last result of my wretched

existence, a healthy and really significant poetic production. The affectation of *Weltschmerz*, no matter what air it assumes, is nothing and has no more truth and significance than a feverish illusion, whether it appears in Lord Byron, or in me, or anywhere else. Ah and Alas and O are not music." He is determined that his future dramas shall show less personal bitterness, more of the overflowing abundance of life. And yet he does not forget to add that they must preserve the same fundamental basis as before. We see the poet struggling hard with the philosopher in him. In this same mood he resolves not to send off *Schnock* for publication. It was not good enough for him. "Well drawn," he says, "but what a face!" What we see taking place in Hebbel is the preparation for a higher sphere of art.

During this year in Paris Hebbel's relation to Elise Lensing reached a crisis, within him at least, if not to outward appearances. Upon the death of their first boy, Max, temporarily overwhelmed by his own grief and Elise's despair, he wrote her letters full of tenderness, letters that recognized unreservedly what she had been to him. He suffered agonies when her life seemed to be endangered. He offered to return to Hamburg, he thought of having her come to Paris, he gave her the most sacred assurances that he would marry her whenever his circumstances would allow it. There is no doubt that he was sincere in all these letters. They show that on their face. It cut him to the quick that Elise had to suffer from gossip, or be treated with indignity. He spoke of her in his letters as his wife, addressed many letters to Frau Doctor Hebbel, and welcomed her suggestion, that they claim to have been united secretly. He regards her as his wife in conscience, and consoles her with an illustrious line of men who had despised the legal forms of marriage—Hegel, Goethe, Thorwaldsen, and Hamann; the last, he adds, even being an orthodox Christian. He knew that Elise valued this orthodoxy if he did not.

But this mood in him gradually changed. If he had ever loved Elise he no longer loved her. That would not have stood in his way, however. Marriage without love he

would have risked if he had had the means of living. But he was actually and continually in danger of starving. In cold weather he had to go to bed to keep warm. The only money he had had been given him so that he might travel. In one more year he would be deprived of that last source of income. His friends urged him to obtain a professorship. But his friends, he bitterly remarked, were laboring under the two-fold delusion that Elise had money, and he, learning. With his haphazard education he made no pretense of being a scholar. "If I could be allowed to form them slowly in the depths of my spirit, I might be able to write six or seven dramas more, but I cannot work up lectures." Or why not take over the editorship of the *Telegraph*? Gutzkow had given it up, and Campe hinted that Hebbel would be acceptable as his successor. But here again he was the slave of his genius. How could he fill up long columns weekly? How could he form the literary connections and gain the support necessary for the undertaking? He knew that he could not. He could not even follow the plain hint of his friend, Oehlenschläger, to review his dramas in Germany, because he did not believe in them.

We should not forget that Hebbel was thus helpless under the pressure of his inner soul. The only thing which that commanded him to do, no one seemed to want. He believed, indeed, that it would gain him immortality, "a place on the cross" along with his predecessors. But the immediate question facing him was much simpler: How keep from starving? Under these circumstances he began to grow impatient with Elise's repeated suggestions that he return to Hamburg and settle down with her. Again and again he explains his whole situation to her carefully, and a wave of anger sweeps over him when her insistence recommences. Gradually he begins to get the conception of love to which later in Rome he gives clear expression. After all it is entirely selfish. Elise's sacrifice, which had drawn from him such fervent praise and so deep an admiration, now seems but a phase of her effort, unconscious, of course, to secure the desired possession. She appears now to consider herself more than she does him. He does not blame

her for this. He accepts it as a fact in life, but it leaves him freer to act for his own salvation. This feeling in him was well defined when he left Paris, and it is more and more in evidence in the letters written from Italy.

With the assistance of the elder Rousseau, Hebbel, before leaving for Italy, was enabled to secure the degree of doctor of philosophy from the University of Erlangen—that is, in all except the name, about which he was chiefly concerned. Unable to pay some of the necessary expenses at last, he was compelled to wait several years longer for the formal installment into the title. His dissertation was on the theory of the drama. It has been lost, but was compounded, according to Kuh, from the two essays above discussed. He valued his new attainment highly as one of those externals to which he had seen the world attach such importance, whether clothes, manners, or titles.

Letters had come to him in Paris from Oehlenschläger, advising against his marriage, and hinting that he should continue his travels. In any case the extension of the allowance he had been receiving from Denmark was doubtful, and much more than doubtful should he remain longer in one place. Accordingly, in September, 1844, he left Paris for Rome. His prospects seemed to be growing darker instead of brighter. The increase of his literary reputation had not been considerable. In one sense *Mary Magdalene* was another disappointment, and the *Preface* hindered rather than aided a wider comprehension of his intentions. He was still in a position where small favors, such as the inclusion of poems by him in Goedeke's anthology of German poets from 1813 to 1845 appeared to him as an event, and he could still write bitterly that he counted not a single friend among "the little men that make the great," that is the reviewers. This was all very different from what he had expected back in Copenhagen when he wrote those letters to Janinski about his changed attitude to life.

Hebbel reached Rome in the autumn of 1844. His money, even with the extreme care he was accustomed to exercise, could not last more than a few months longer. To

his application in Copenhagen for an extension of the allowance, the answer was slow in coming, and then it brought him only the price of his trip back to Germany. Dire necessity conquered his pride and anger, forcing him to retain what he considered as an insulting pittance. For economy's sake he took a room where the sun never shone, thus exposing himself to disease, which soon put in appearance. Narrowly escaping the dangerous typhus fever, he was finally induced by a friend to take better quarters. This friend was the landscape painter, Louis Gurlitt, who later, in the most delicate manner, forced on the penniless poet a considerable loan of money. In Rome Hebbel's circle of friends was larger than it had ever been before. Most of the men he met were German artists, and here, practically for the first time in his life, he conversed freely with many men and on subjects appropriate to his natural sphere. Robert Kolbenheier, an amateur painter, has left an interesting description of Hebbel's personal appearance and impression at this time. Especially does he mention with admiration the power and wealth of the poet's eloquence, the abundance of his ideas, the force and beauty of his imagery in conversation. In a half hour, and as if it were by the way, Hebbel, he says, would display an intensity of thought that would have served most men a life-time.

But for all that was so painful in his circumstances Hebbel would have been very happy in Rome. He succeeded much better with Italian than with French, perhaps because he approached the study of it in a more practical way. Honor was accorded him as was his due. In spite of his pessimism he found that his reputation was growing. A new critical journal in Berlin (the *Modespiegel*) had spoken of his *Mary Magdalene* with the highest admiration, at the same time demanding that it be given on the stage. Various German travelers thought it worth their while to visit him in Rome, among them such young men as Hermann Hettner and Theodor Mommsen. He enjoyed the street life, the carnivals, the museums, the public buildings. Elise's warnings of the jealousy of Italian men, however, or her own jealousy of the beautiful Gagiati, who seemed inclined to favor

Hebbel, were needless. How could a man pursue such advantages when the sleeves of his coat—and that borrowed from Gurlitt—failed to reach his wrists? In spite of his desperate effort to keep up appearances, the poet was so threadbare that his ill-wishers made him an object of their ridicule. Whenever Gurlitt would propose that they go out and dine together, Hebbel's invariable answer was that he had already dined.

In Italy Hebbel's life, both in its inner and outer aspects, tended to a more definite shape, though the gloom which enveloped him did not brighten in the least, but rather seemed to become heavier as he looked into the future. His decision not to marry Elise was definitely taken there. If Paris had aroused his sensibilities to the value of life, Italy was not likely to dull them by abstract conventions of duty. In the midst of beauty he writes to Elise: "Perish what is not beautiful!" He still affirms his deep appreciation of what she has been to him, he still declares that she is the noblest spirited woman living, still comprehends the tragedy of her situation as fully as that of his own. But his letters, with the reflex they show of hers, indicate that both have grown sensitive and irritable. He writes her that she has had nothing but unpleasant things to tell him since he left Hamburg, that she seems to think only of her happiness and never of his. It vexes him when she speaks of his "happy days in Rome," as if he could be happy! Or when she calls him melancholy, as if his wretchedness were a quality of his soul! Even such little things as her frequent appeals *an den lieben Gott*, arouse his resentment as pious and empty phrases. And when he discovers that she has announced herself to Campe as his wife, and even written to officials in Copenhagen in that capacity, he does not withhold his anger. He tells her definitely—what he had often indicated—that he does not love her as a man should love his wife. His intention not to marry for the present—in ten years, perhaps, yes!—takes final form. A man, he says, may dispose of anything, only not of his own person. He enters in his *Diary* (February, 1845) the significant statement, that a man should put aside whatever hinders his

development, since what would destroy him would not advance another.

Likewise Hebbel's relation to his art underwent, or continued to undergo, an equally important phase. In Paris, perhaps in its subtle beginnings even in Copenhagen, the poet caught, as we have seen, a vision of a more clarified and harmonious art, of a form in which personal and eccentric bitterness should have no part. Judging his own works by this standard, he found in them too many traces of his own individual conflicts. Rome was the place to accelerate this process in him. Entirely indifferent to the ruins, the schools of art, to all that interests the antiquarian, he yielded himself to the impressions made on him by Michaelangelo, Raphael, the classic works, and especially by beautiful women and Italian nature. "Fullness of life and greatness of form," such becomes his ideal in art, and we shall see with what tenacity he holds to it. He begins to contrast the German language with others, to ask what are its advantages and disadvantages. It is not, he says, essentially euphonious like Italian, it can never be made music, but it is not necessarily discord. It has well-sounding words, and can with great care be moulded into beautiful verse. But above all it possesses an unequalled subtlety of expression. Scarcely has he made these observations, when he sets out to prove their validity in his own poetry. As he had first found expression in lyric poetry, so now his lyric poetry is the first phase of his work to embody his new ideal of art. He wrote a poem of over one hundred lines, entitled, *Spring's Sacrifice*. What he had intended to do, and believed he had done in this poem, can be best told in his own words. It is well to remember that they are a purely personal expression, occurring in a letter to Elise. "This Italian spring has encouraged me to write a poem, which I am enclosing, and in which, face to face with so fair a world, I have attempted to do whatever is possible in the German language. I have composed this poem down to the slightest detail with great care, and set myself the task not only of playing on the instrument of our language, but of tuning this instrument itself to a purer tone." He then

proceeds to explain how he has endeavored to combine in the highest possible degree depth and tenderness of thought with grace, harmony, and purity of expression. He is satisfied with the result. This poem, he writes, is a sign that "nature, provided only fortune . . . favors me, and does not let me perish in poverty and misery, will yet sometime bestow on me a highest favor . . . that she will hold me worthy of her use in expressing not only what is significant, but also what is beautiful. But fearful again is the struggle of my spirit. I have not come to Italy in vain. I feel as if I had once more been broken into the elements (of my being), and as if nature were occupied in putting me together anew."

Hebbel seems never to have changed his mind as to the value of this poem, which, as it seems to the author, he exaggerated. Its outward form possesses indeed the euphony and melody he sought to attain, and the idea *may* be one of depth and tenderness, but idea and form are not always happily joined. Yet the very idea itself would seem to be the sort of fancy which the poet, in a letter to Bamberg, claimed it was not. He imagined that he had observed a sudden falling of blossoms in the spring not ascribable to any motion of the air. Not seeking any natural cause for this, he attributed it to a shudder of spring at its own beauty, and this again he explained as a fear of punishment by higher powers for being too fair. To avoid this punishment, spring makes a voluntary offering of its beauty. The poem is thus a sort of metaphysical allegory. The personification of spring as a beautiful youth is not particularly convincing in this poem; nor is the attributing to natural objects (birds, trees, etc.) personal feelings and movements. Besides, as Mörike observes, the sudden falling of blossoms together, to which the poem works up as a climax, can scarcely be imagined apart from a motion of the air. It must be added, however, that the Swabian poet, in spite of certain reservations, speaks of *Spring's Sacrifice* as a charming and melodious work.

Hebbel's favorite forms were now the two most conservative possible: the sonnet and the distichon. Ten

sonnets and ninety epigrams he wrote between March 8 and May 29, 1845. He is not afraid of the old bottles if he can only get the new wine. And we find this same attitude to language clearly expressed in the lines, *The German Language*. There is such a thing as the genius of a language, though it binds the creative spirit by no strict rules. It leaves room for free movement and fresh charm. Like nature it has endless springs, but in equally endless variety. In expressing this view Hebbel is but saying in another way what he had always said regarding the relation between the individual and the universal. His idea of cultivation in life is identical with his conception of style in art, and beauty is for him a guarantee of both. In that alone can the harmony we yearn for approach us, and that alone seems to rest in eternal calm amid the chaos of the surrounding world. This is nothing new that came into his spirit, not a passing mood awakened by the Juno Ludovisi or the Apollo Belvedere. He had already written sonnets to beauty, and as far back as Munich the perfect restraint and harmony of Goethe's *Iphigenie* stood before his mind as an unattainable ideal. But nothing could have been better fitted than Italian art and nature to accelerate the unfolding of his mind in the direction inevitable for it from the beginning. When Hebbel was at work on his *Judith*, he rejoiced in the energy and unrestraint of his prose, which then seemed to him so much better a medium than verse. For *Genoveva* this unrestraint proved to be too great a restraint, so that he loosed his bolder imaginings in poetry. The superabundance he there showed, the excess of power and depth, was the very excess upon which, as he says in an epigram, beauty feeds. To find the balance between power and grace, to discover the freedom that form allows and the restrictions it imposes, to develop a style at once individual and classical—this was the task separating the works of his first period from those of his second, the task his Italian experiences helped him accomplish.

The time between June and October of 1845 Hebbel spent in Naples, as he records, the happiest months of his life. This trip was made possible by a loan which Gurlitt

advanced. There he met the two "Sicilian sisters," to whom he dedicated some fine stanzas. The elder he preferred, happy to touch her hand, but it was the younger who preferred him. He visited Vesuvius and Pompeii, the latter, apparently, with little interest. Hermann Hettner was for a time, at least, his steady companion in walks and conversation. He led a double life as far as his writing was concerned, one southern and one northern; the one reflected in his sonnets, the other in his dramatic work. In Naples he was busy with his *Moloch*, a drama long since begun, and in tone and subject foreign to his present surroundings. Or else he was engaged with the harassing idea of the drama, *Julia*.

His dwindling funds reminded him that he must turn northward again. Rome would be only a station on his journey, Germany the ultimate goal. In many of his remarks we can notice that the limit of his suffering is almost reached. His long apprenticeship of failure and wretchedness must come to an end, or he will be lost. He did not demand much. "As a poet," he writes, "I shall never have the slightest influence on the masses." This did not discourage him. On the contrary, he expresses considerable contempt for the public. He does not relish the idea of his poems being "snuffed at by ox and ass—a terrible thought, by Heavens!"¹ But he believed there was an audience waiting for him, and he knew the time had come when he must see more of the fruits of his work. He could no longer be content with his bare and lonely existence. He would not "sit in a corner in Germany." He therefore clearly states that his life must now at last either take an upward course or come to an end.

He left Italy with misgivings, wondering whether life there had not unfitted him for his native land. Public conditions in Germany were also in a state of unrest that would render it the more difficult for him to obtain a hearing in his chosen field, since he could not write for the passing hour.

¹ Hebbel, like most people, was a person of moods. He later expressed the very opposite view from this, at least with reference to his dramas.

He was not only out of funds, he was heavily in debt. All signs were lacking that his course was about to lead him upward. On the boat between Ancona and Triest the passengers speculated as to whether he had a half or a whole year to live. He seems to have had Berlin in view. The circumstance that favorable notice of his work had appeared in the *Vienna Yearbook*, edited by Deinhardtstein, determined him, however, to visit that city on his way northward. And thus, unwitting, he took the current where it served.

Hebbel arrived in Vienna on November 8, 1845. The account of what actually happened to him there reads like a romance. First, he went to see Deinhardtstein, who had spoken highly of his dramas. Deinhardtstein was encouraging. In fact nearly every one was encouraging. August Frankl² declares that Hebbel was deceived by the affability of the Viennese, and, in the beginning, took people too much at their word. Deinhardtstein sent him to Dietrichstein, the superintendent of the famous Burgtheater, which since the early part of the century, the days of Schreyvogel, had been established as the leading German stage. Unfortunately Dietrichstein had never heard of Hebbel, and when this fact became known in Vienna, he never forgave the poet for his own ignorance. The interview was not satisfactory, and Hebbel believed that the literary battle was lost. He visited Grillparzer, who, embittered by the reception of his works, had long since turned his back on the public. The Austrian dramatist was cordial, but silent concerning Hebbel's works, and unable to give him an encouraging report on literary conditions in Vienna. We know from Kulke³ what impression Hebbel made on Grillparzer. Upon first meeting him, he said that only one man could have influenced him, and he was dead (Goethe). A year later, however, he said: "I was wrong. Goethe could not have influenced him." Each of these great dramatists respected the other, within limits, but no closer relation developed between them. Hebbel

² Zur Biographie Fr. Hebbels, Wien, 1884, p. 5.

³ Erinnerungen an Friedrich Hebbel, Wien, 1878, p. 11.

also met Friedrich Halm (Count Münch-Bellinghausen), the author of *Griseldis* (1834), *Ingomar the Barbarian* (1843), and other much given plays. From him also he received no substantial advancement of his purpose, and he had now come to think little of verbal assurances.

Hebbel was deeply discouraged. Vienna apparently took no notice of him. Then, unexpectedly, articles began to appear on him and his work in the *Austrian Morgenblatt*. They were written by Siegmund Engländer, subsequently one of the poet's warmest youthful adherents. It is interesting to notice the tone of these articles before and after their author's personal acquaintance with Hebbel. At first Engländer is objective and critical, though he does not fail to praise. Hebbel, he says, is not yet an artist but a force, his dramas lack harmony, his characters are too self-conscious, his language hasty and sketchy. In *Judith* the end is bad, even *Mary Magdalene* lacks a center of gravity. But these works are colossal even in their failure. They show great promise in the originality and vigor of their historical conception, in the force of their characterization, in the genuineness of their atmosphere. Hebbel is, in short, the greatest dramatic talent of the present. In the third article (December 29, 1845), which speaks of a personal acquaintance with the poet, it is easy to observe that the young critic has been overwhelmed by the force of Hebbel's conversation. He retracts some of his former objections, and where he was critical before, now he is enthusiastic. His ideas are plainly influenced by the poet's dramatic theory, with which we are familiar.

And now all at once Hebbel became the center of attraction. Authors sought him out, actors from the Burg-theater flocked about him, declaring themselves eager to play the rôles he had created. If their wishes could have been realized, his goal would have soon been reached. But the iron-clad Austrian censorship stood in the way. No Biblical material was allowed to pass, so what chance was there for *Judith*? The words "holy," "crucifix," and their like could not be profaned, so how could the saintly Genoveva appear in Vienna? Such a work as *Mary Mag-*

dalene was entirely out of the question. Changes were proposed in Hebbel's works, which, as he said, made his hair stand on end. It was still the Austria of Metternich, where literature was favored as a pleasant narcotic to prevent the people from awakening to the demands of a new century. Little wonder that Hebbel decided to continue his journey to Berlin.

His fortune, however, willed it otherwise. Just as he was making arrangements to leave, a gentleman slightly known to him met him by chance, and told him of two Galician barons who were eager to make his acquaintance. Hebbel named a time and place to meet them, and there he found an invitation to spend the evening with them. He was received with embarrassing enthusiasm. There followed a night of wild celebration, with declamation of passages from *Judith* and *Genoveva*, with wine, pheasants, and champagne, in the midst of which, the poet, being unable to check the superabundant homage paid him, at least took good care to eat and drink as much as he wanted. "I had to spend the night there too," he writes, "my precious life could not be exposed to the danger of taking cold, and I slept under damask covers with golden fringes." The name of these two *dü ex machina* was Zerboni di Sposetti, and the elder of them thought and spoke of Hebbel as a modern prophet. He invited the poet to visit him at his castle in Galicia, and write there at his ease. The story, taken thus far from Hebbel's last extant letters to Elise, is continued by Emil Kuh. Christmas evening Hebbel celebrated with some others at the hotel of his new friends. They compelled him to spend the night there, and the next morning Wilhelm von Zerboni entered his room, bringing a new suit of clothes, "fell on his knees, asked for pardon, etc. Hebbel had gone to bed as a poor poet, he got up like a fashion print. From necktie to shoes, everything elegant and modern. In addition, a splendid white overcoat, a silver-headed cane, and other things of that sort." From this time on he had his rooms in the *Archduke Charles*.⁴

⁴ Kuh II, 166.

Thus, for the time being, at least, Hebbel had attained to the environment and clothes that make the man.

He was now the man of the hour in Vienna. The younger writers especially, and quite erroneously, saw in the author of *Judith* and *Mary Magdalene* the standard-bearer of a new storm and stress. At a banquet in honor of Karl Egon Ebert, scarcely had the first toast been drunk to the guest of honor, and before the toastmaster could anticipate them, these young men arose and drank a stormy toast to the Ditmarsh poet, who was present. However pleasant all these events were, they alone could not have determined Hebbel to remain in Austria. But Deinhardtstein now seemed to be making earnest efforts to bring his dramas on the stage, and, what was of more vital importance, the poet had made the acquaintance of an actress at the Burgtheater whom he resolved to marry. This was Christine Enghaus, then twenty-nine years of age, a good actress and a beautiful woman. She had formerly acted in Hamburg, which city she left for Vienna in 1840. Hebbel's dramas, with which she had long been familiar, made a deep impression on her. At the Burgtheater the parts she would have preferred were already monopolized, chiefly by Madam Rettich, a favorite of Friedrich Halm, so that she was not altogether satisfied with her situation.

The relation between these two was entered into with frank confessions on both sides. Each had a history. We know Hebbel's. And Christine Enghaus was a mother, having been loved and deserted. Hebbel said that he had a hard struggle with himself at first, somewhat like the Secretary in his drama. But he was ashamed to set up a moral demand that he himself refused to meet—at least, such is his own testimony in a letter to Bamberg. The marriage was quickly resolved upon. Love there was on both sides—the subsequent test of life showed that—but there were also other considerations on both sides. Hebbel hoped to establish himself on a better living basis, and especially through Christine to force his way on the stage. He planned something like a reform of the stage with the works he would produce and she interpret. He had the

highest opinion of her art as an actress. On her side, apart from any social considerations, pity was strongly mingled with love. She was deeply touched by the neglected condition of the poet and the evidences in his appearance of the sufferings through which he had passed. The marriage was solemnized on May 26, 1846. This step, resolved upon after the fullest reflection, Hebbel always asserted to have been his salvation. And no doubt it was.

The letters that passed between Elise Lensing and Hebbel on this occasion were destroyed by Bamberg. This is not to be regretted. The trend of their latter correspondence, Hebbel's letters to his friends, some passages of which we regret his writing, so bitter is the tone, and Kuh's characterization of the lost letters, give us a sufficiently vivid impression of the harsh criminations and recriminations in which this once noble relation terminated. A closer view would be too painful. Elise, who had always assured Hebbel that she would put nothing in the way of his marriage with another, was utterly unable to face the situation when it arose. She held up to the poet the tender letters he had once written her, and, as he says, involved herself in endless contradictions. In these despairing efforts we can only understand her better and pity her the more. But she even went to the extent of demanding from the poet, who in that respect was surely above reproach, a promise in legal form to care for his child. Hebbel could not forgive her this. He declared, in his turn, that such conduct released him from the inward pangs which he otherwise would have felt. Perhaps he would have been glad indeed to be released from those pangs. In this difficult situation Christine Enghaus showed herself possessed of the finest sympathy. She entered into Elise's position, and as she comprehended it more fully, she often took sides with her against Hebbel himself. It was her pure humanity that overcame all distrust and hatred, thus making way for a friendship which was to prevent Elise from dragging out her life in bitterness and gloom.

In Hebbel's married life there were certain differences at the beginning that had to be adjusted. With accustomed

decision and energy he took charge of all financial affairs, consisting at first mainly of his wife's salary. What came in from his writings he sent to Hamburg. Christine's relations, who had enjoyed her generosity hitherto, did not like this change, of course. But Hebbel had debts and he believed in paying them, so he arranged a more modest scale of living. Christine's patience was often tried, too, by his sudden temper and his imperious disposition, though she said that his innate sense of justice, of its own force, soon corrected such outbursts. Emil Kuh, who furnishes these facts, describes her patience as "heroic." These differences, however, were unable to affect the deeper basis on which their relation was founded. From now on the bitterness in Hebbel's life vanishes more and more. He faces the denial of the most modest wishes with an increasing calmness. And he gives his wife full credit for the more friendly aspect of his fate.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRANSITION: TWO TRAGEDIES, TWO ESSAYS, AND
A BOOK OF VERSE

DURING the autumn of 1846 and the first months of the next year, Hebbel practically completed two dramas, his mind being occupied with material for a third. Of these, the *Tragedy in Sicily*, in one act, may be regarded as a failure. Hebbel had a characteristic way of recognizing his own shortcomings, a way in which he always managed to defend what was defensible and explain what was not. The work itself he called an *unicum*, something on the dividing line between tragedy and comedy. He and his friends gave it the name of tragicomedy. It is based on a story he heard in Italy of two gendarmes who murder a young girl at the place of meeting appointed by her lover, and then seize him for the murder when he arrives. A thief nearby in hiding from the gendarmes sees the whole occurrence and has them brought to justice. Hebbel manipulated this story with reference to two ideas: first, the results when the instruments of justice themselves are criminal; second, the danger of accumulated wealth. This latter idea he grafted into the material by an invention of his own. We have a rich old *podesta* whose experience has convinced him that he can buy the exclusive rights in anything or anybody. He wishes to marry the beautiful young daughter of a friend, who is sold to him by virtue of gambling debts, and who very unwillingly consents to pay his daughter on that score. The daughter frustrates this plan by running away from home to marry the man of her own choice. Unfortunately he comes too late to the place appointed, only to find her murdered. Two gendarmes arrest him and accuse him of the deed. Willing to leave a world of such horrors he confesses the crime he did not commit. This causes one of the gendarmes to believe that

the prisoner is insane, and fearing eternal damnation should he permit an insane man to be executed, he is about to tell the whole truth. At this moment the thief appears from his place of hiding to reveal what he has seen. These events occur all at one place in the woods, and, toward the end, in the presence of the *podesta* and the father, who have come out to search for the girl.

The only part of this *Tragedy in Sicily* that is done with any poetic warmth whatever, is the opening scene between the gensdarmes. Hebbel conceived here a very striking situation—a “couple of poltroons, each of whom is ashamed of his cowardice and wishes to impress the other when an opportunity presents itself.” This idea is carried out with considerable success. As for the rest of the work, the most impressive thing is the self-characterization of the old weasel of a *podesta*. The other characters fade away into nothingness, and from the play as a whole we turn away with a shudder, our consciousness dominated not by any “idea” whatever, but by the picture of a beautiful and innocent girl brutally murdered in the woods. Hebbel intended again, as in *Mary Magdalene*, to give us a criticism of society; a father selling his daughter to save appearances, a *podesta*, chosen to represent order and himself creating the greatest confusion, a couple of bailiffs sent out to arrest a thief, and themselves committing murder. But no poetic energy transfused these elements with life, and the criticism, instead of being burned into our souls as in the former play, passes by with little more emphasis than that attained by a reporter’s story in the morning paper.

Far above the *Tragedy in Sicily*, and equally far below Hebbel’s real standards, was the other play to which reference has been made, *Julia*. This was practically completed by November, 1846, and somewhat before the work just described. It is in three acts and in prose, the scene being laid in Italy. Hebbel regularly referred to *Julia* as the second part of *Mary Magdalene*, and one of the characters, Tobaldi, is Master Anton under somewhat altered circumstances. To present day readers the drama strongly suggests Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, as has been often said, and Count

Bertram is a sort of Captain Alving with a (belated) conscience. Even that, however, is a considerable difference. Tobaldi, like Anton, is a man of extreme rectitude, who pursues duty to the point where it ceases to be a virtue. His emotions are like the fires of some laboring volcano, intermittently steady, violent, and destructive. He has an only daughter, the one pledge left him by his wife, who died in the pangs of childbirth. Gradually, as the girl develops in beauty similar to her mother, the thought takes hold of him that his wife has returned to him in a different shape and relation, a motive that Hebbel twice made use of before, as we have seen. He centers his hopes and affections on her, though in a peculiar way. There is in him nothing of the feminine which makes possible a sympathetic approach to difficult confessions. Matters of greatest concern happen in Julia's life and he has no notion of them. When one morning he wakes to find her gone—she had bidden him good night with more than usual tenderness—he cannot believe his senses. The truth dawns on him, and Julia is dead to him from this time on. That he may never take pity on her in the future, he proclaims her dead of a sudden and contagious disease. Physician and servant, long friends of the family, he forces to acquiesce in his monstrous plan.

Julia, in the meantime, has fled from home to find her secret lover, who had failed to return for her according to his promise. Reaching his native town, she wanders first among the new-made graves, firmly expecting to find him there. But neither among the living nor the dead can she discover the object of her search. She is about to find a welcome death at the hands of a villain whom her jewels tempt, when Count Bertram saves her life. Before this Count Bertram has given us a pretty accurate account of himself. Originally a man of great ability, he has ruined his health by riotous living. He recognizes this fully and faces the consequences with moral courage. His old servant advises him to marry and settle down, but he knows that the only real *mesalliance* is that between life and death. "That," he says, "is the mother of ghosts!" He does not

ask whether he shall marry, but whether he has a right to die by his own hands. Life means no more to him, but could he not in some way make atonement for his profanation of life? Having destroyed a human being, himself, he would like to save some other human being to the world.

He thinks Julia offers him the chance. But Julia does not want to be saved. He is able to discover her reason for preferring death, and at once offers himself—not as a person, as a mere object suitable for the formal ceremony—to be her husband. The sword shall lie between them, and if her lover is found she is free. For then Count Bertram would have earned the right to die. Julia does not comprehend him, but she trusts his word, and in order to save her father's honor and her child's existence, she consents. With him she returns to her father's house in time to see her own funeral procession going out of it. She is heavily veiled, so no one recognizes her outside the house. Tobaldi remains inexorable, addresses her as *Madam* with stoical heroism, and persists in burying his daughter. There is, however, toward the end of this scene, some weakening of his severity, and he consents that Alberto, the physician, follow Julia to Bertram's estate in Tyrol to see that she is properly married to him. He will never see her again, but he can think of her again. This is the end of the second of the three acts.

The amount of new information the poet brings in the third and last act of his play, indicates plainly what a confusing wealth of material he attempted to dispose of at one time. Of course, the lost lover, Antonio by name, returns. And now for the first time, we learn, and Julia learns, his history. He is a robber captain. An almost fatal wound explains his failure to appear before, or even send word of himself. He is the son of Grimaldi, a political exile, who from bitterness became an outlaw. Antonio has thus grown up outside the pale of society. His father, wishing to restore him to civilization, long kept him in ignorance of his real position in life. But finally it was made known to him when his father was captured and executed. He swears revenge on society in general, and Tobaldi in particular,

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who, to be sure from friendly motives, had originally caused his father's overthrow. Hence he had sought out Julia. But in entrapping her he found himself entrapped. A relation begun with diabolic intentions ended in genuine love. What a surprising turn to affairs! What a remarkable reversion to robber romanticism in the midst of a social drama! Nothing could be further from our interest than such a story at such a point in the drama.

Here follows the "discussion" so characteristic of the modern drama. Antonio, who with growing amazement has followed the rapid course of events—Julia's death, burial, sudden reappearance, and marriage—now demands from her an explanation with as much vehemence as she from him. He does not believe in Bertram's noble self-sacrifice, as he conceives it to be, but suspects rather that Bertram is endeavoring, under false guise, to win Julia's love. In the admiration and gratitude she pays her husband, Antonio already sees the success of this scheme. His hasty, though quite natural, interpretation of Bertram's motives, and Julia's as well, comes near losing him her love indeed. By his rashness he almost occasions the very transfer of affections which he so fears. But Bertram convinces him, and he finds his better self. Like Julia, he is willing to resign all claims to happiness in order to atone for his past wrongdoings. Here we have again, firmly touched, the main chord of the drama: atonement for sin by resignation of claims to happiness. Not resignation in death, as in *Rosmersholm*, but in life, a more active form of atonement. In Hebbel's view, the right to die must be earned if it is to have any moral significance. And so, at the close of the drama, these three persons stand facing one another. Count Bertram's willingness to sacrifice his existence cannot, of course, be accepted by those whom such a sacrifice would benefit. The reader, indeed, is left to infer that Bertram is a clever enough man to arrange his accidental demise in a very natural way. The mountains of Tyrol are dangerous and he is fond of goat hunting. This forward glance at the end, however, does not detract from the inner moral victory that Julia and Antonio win over

themselves, for they entertain no hopes. Such, at least, must have been Hebbel's intention. It would probably have been served better had the drama closed with the first four lines of Bertram's last speech.

After completing *Julia*, Hebbel sent it to the editor of the *Annals of Dramatic Art*, in Berlin, Professor Theodor Röttscher, whose opinion he valued highly, and Röttscher gave it to the management of the Royal Theater for consideration. They were afraid of it and returned it to the poet. This was in 1847. The next year brought the revolution in Germany and Austria, the Vienna censorship was liberalized, and the director of the Burgtheater, Franz von Holbein, secured *Julia* from Hebbel for presentation on that stage. Berlin at once followed suit. Holbein, however, failed to give *Julia*, though *Judith* and *Mary Magdalene* were then, since the revolution, being played with frequency and success. Berlin delayed likewise, and some vigorous correspondence passed between Küstner, the director, and Hebbel, who had his contract and insisted on its execution. Küstner's offer of a financial consideration was rejected, and the case was finally compromised by Hebbel consenting to the substitution of *Mary Magdalene* for *Julia*. In the meantime a year or two had elapsed, the conservatives had the upperhand again, the censorship exercised most of its old authority, the time for *Julia* had passed. Laube succeeded Holbein in Vienna, and in answer to Hebbel's inquiry, why *Julia* was not given as agreed upon, replied that the management doubted the "esthetic and moral value" of the work. These facts the poet made known in a preface to *Julia*, which was published in 1851. He adduced them to prove that the condition of dramatists after 1848 was no better than it had been before, that between them and the public stood the same overzealous guardians of public morals. He did not blame the public for the slight popularity of his dramas, but those who kept his dramas from the public. He said that his works would appeal to the last man in the gallery as well as the first man in the orchestra. After all, he had no serious objection to "ox and ass snuffing at" his works.

The preface to *Julia* is an interesting document. In it Hebbel does not waste a word defending the esthetic value of his drama. But he does energetically defend its moral value. Nothing vexed Hebbel more than the charge of immorality in his dramas. In his eyes, though he does not confuse the spheres of preacher and poet, a poetic work which lacked the basis of morality (*Sitte*), lacked everything. All that he wrote was in the interest of a higher morality, a morality reduced to the inexorable terms of necessity, so that it has nothing to fear because it has nothing to lose. Defending *Julia* from this point of view, he says: "Undeniably, there is in my *Julia* much that is unreasonable and immoral. But I assert that no drama is conceivable which is not unreasonable and immoral in all its stages. Quite naturally, for in every particular stage passion is in control, and with it partiality and excess. Reason and morality can find expression only in the total work and are the result of the corrections meted out to the characters by the concatenations of their fate. If we look closely, the poet selects from the world the most unreasonable and immoral elements, and by placing cause and effect closer together than is accustomed to happen in reality, reduces them for his part to morality and reason. One should never ask from what point he starts, but to what point he comes." Hebbel then applies these general statements to his drama. It is unnecessary to follow him in this, as his case is quite clear. But it is interesting to notice how near Hebbel stood, in this preface, to the two paths that led, on the one hand to *Ghosts*, and on the other to a play like *Damaged Goods*. It would seem that he almost touched the problems of these dramas. He says that, however common the Bertram of his first act might be, the Bertram of his last would scarcely be found in Europe. The real Bertrams marry, if they can, and call into existence wretched creatures, "condemned without guilt and from the beginning to eternal suffering."

Why did not Hebbel pursue this course, so favorably begun in *Mary Magdalene*? The answer to this question is significant for his innermost nature. The speculative cast

of his mind prevented him from becoming a practical preacher to humanity. He too conceived of the poet as the seer, the truth-teller, the prophet, the mouthpiece of the divine will. But he was trying to find more significant symbols for the expression of his truth, or perhaps it is better to say that he had the vision of a larger truth, which necessitated these symbols. An ideal of this symbolic form, a perception of beauty, had been shaping itself in his mind. Even before finishing *Julia*, he characterized it as a work of transition, and already he had begun his *Herodes und Mariamne*, the first of his later dramas. A letter to Kühne (June, 1848) gives us an account of his feelings during this period of transition. "My ideas," he writes, "are becoming much clearer, especially since the conflicts out of which my earlier dramas grew are now being dealt with and historically settled on the streets. For the rotten conditions of the world weighed me down as if I alone had to suffer under them, and to bring their untenableness to light by artistic means, seemed to me not unworthy of art. This I did, without, of course, concealing from myself for a moment the divergence between what I intended and what I accomplished. I now consider myself relieved. I shall no longer paint the old prison without chimney and window, for it is collapsing and we can think of a new building." With a sigh of relief he closes this chapter of his works and opens a new, in which he trusts that everything will be freer, more significant, more universal. This was less a change of ideas than of artistic form. He did not intend to pass by the problems of life, nor to pursue a heavenly beauty. Harmony was to be wrung from the problem, beauty from the struggle of its elements. But he would never again give so plain and direct, so particular a discussion of the ills of society. The material of his later dramas is always drawn from legend or history.

Compared with *Mary Magdalene* as a work of art, *Julia* is anything but an improvement. It is full of epic elements, of narrative where we should expect presentation. The plot, which in a work of this kind should be as natural and evident as possible, is improbable and obscure. The poet

spoke of two ideas as embodied in this work: the Bertram idea of atonement, and the Antonio idea of a man born outside the pale of society. What connection is there between these ideas? Neither one is necessary to the other. The second would have a psychological rather than a social interest such as is demanded by the first. And since the first is, beyond question, the main theme of the drama, the latter resolves itself into an unfortunately chosen subsidiary. Besides, as Hebbel presents it to us it is not convincing.

In the same year (1846), the first noteworthy performance of *Mary Magdalene* was arranged at the City Theater in Leipzig. It attracted considerable attention, its repetition drawing a number of distinguished visitors from Berlin. The actor who gave Master Anton said, in a letter to Emil Kuh, that the performance was a triumph for the actors, rather than for the poet, and that the motives for Clara's conduct were severely criticised by the public. Yet he praised the effect of the vigorous characterization, the clear outlines, and the energetic language. Heinrich Laube (*Burgtheater*, p. 227) says, that the second performance was a failure, the house being practically empty and not a woman in the audience. At any rate, Hebbel felt encouraged by the event, some other cities followed Leipzig, and the poet's letters expressed the hope that better times for him had begun.

While the theaters seemed to be taking up *Mary Magdalene*, the beginning of what Hebbel termed a deeper criticism of his works was made in the shape of a little volume written by Bamberg, and published by Hoffmann and Campe (1846). This essay was entitled: *Concerning the Influence of Contemporary Events on Literature and Concerning the Works of Friedrich Hebbel*. Bamberg reviewed the three main published plays of Hebbel, particularly in their symbolic aspects, and went into a considerable discussion of fundamental principles. It is evident on every page that he had been closely associated with the poet himself, for the theoretical terms of both are the same. He defended Hebbel especially against the common misconcep-

tion that reconciliation was lacking in his tragedies, and pointed out his essential conservatism as opposed to the Young Germans. In general he gave an excellent analysis of the dramas, also on their personal side, though his tendency to overemphasize the idea beyond what even Hebbel would have dared is plain when he describes Golo as less a passionate man than passion personified, and Holofernes as less a powerful man than power personified.

If Hebbel had settled in Vienna with the hopes of gaining influence on the stage there, he was soon to be disillusioned. In his December summary for 1846 he records that he has made a few friends and many enemies. The momentary enthusiasm with which the Viennese had fêted a transient guest changed to hostility when that guest prepared to take permanent lodgings in their midst. Hebbel says the friends turned into "serpents," stole his ideas, corrupted his manuscripts, and "did much worse things." His list of followers, according to his rather pessimistic statement, is soon exhausted: Engländer in Vienna, Bamberg in Paris. It is true, however, that his isolation persisted. Neither the literary journals nor the theaters in Vienna concerned themselves with him. Christine's influence, so far from aiding him, was not sufficient to secure the proper recognition of her place. He now had her battles to fight as well as his.

Hebbel fully realized by this time the impossibility of doing without the reviewers, and he made various efforts to win some of them. He began, the next year, by sending a copy of *Mary Magdalene* to the influential *Allgemeine Zeitung*, accompanied by a mildly firm, frank protest against the unfair impression which that journal had given of his work. He also offered, should it be desired, to send copies of his other works, so that a more connected view of his writings might be had. No reply was made to this reasonable advance on his part, and the paper continued, in passing, to deal out side thrusts at him, or if it said a word of praise took that as a text to disparage him all the more. Cordial relations were formed, however, with Röscher, editor of the *Yearbook of Dramatic Art* in Berlin,

and Kühne, editor of the *Europa*, in Leipzig. Most of all the poet was satisfied with an essay on his *Mary Magdalene* by the great Swabian critic, Professor Fr. Th. Vischer. Vischer's praise meant much, and his blame was instructive. In his *Diary* the poet says, "He recognizes *Mary Magdalene* almost without reserve, and attacks only the *Preface*. To have won so much from this stern, brusque spirit is great in my esteem. It helps calm me inwardly, for more than Vischer and Rötcher I do not need, but they are necessary for me."

This interesting essay was indeed complimentary in Vischer's own manner. After a general statement of the expectant attitude of German dramatic art and of the difficulty German poets had in easily combining their depth with French perfection of form, he declared that Hebbel united these two elements better than any one else in Germany. Hebbel, he thought, understood character as well as suspense in action. What he lacked was a feeling for simple custom. He had made a mistake in converting Judith from a plain Biblical character into a modern problematic woman. The same fault was found with the characters in *Genoveva*, that is, for being at variance with their legendary surroundings, and the structure of that tragedy was severely criticised. But *Mary Magdalene*, he thought, blotted out the memory of all these shortcomings. Vischer recognized this work as an epoch in middle class tragedy, rescuing that *genre*, as it did, from pettiness in motive and a crude balancing of tragic guilt. He praised the analytic technique, and declared that in the art of characterization Hebbel had attained to real significance. But he vented his full wrath on the dedicatory verses and the *Preface*, entirely rejecting the view generally held, that the drama was meant to be one of social criticism. Finally he warned Hebbel not to risk the naive impression of his characters by too much attention to their ideal aspects, and concluded with a sharp limitation of his natural province to the psychological tragedy.

During this year (1847) Elise Lensing came to Vienna to spend more than twelve months in Hebbel's home. Both

she and Christine had endured heavy loss. The little son of Christine and the poet had died in February, only six weeks of age, and in May Ernst Hebbel had died in Hamburg. It was when this misfortune befell Elise that Christine invited her to Vienna, thus hoping to lighten her burden of loneliness, an attempt fully justified by the event.

When Hebbel came, in December, 1847, to sum up his account for the year, he had the following facts to record: the publication of his comedy, *The Diamond*; a great deal of work on *Schnock*, and the preparation of all his stories for the press; the publication of two of them, *Anna* and *Nepomuk Schlängel*, in Vienna; two essays in Rötischer's *Year-book*, one on dramatic style, the other on the *Relation between Power and Consciousness in the Poet*; the writing of an old story, *Mr. Haidvogel and His Family*, in new form; and the preparation of a new volume of poems. These latter were published by J. J. Weber in Leipzig, as Hebbel was not altogether satisfied with Campe, who "still wanted everything for nothing." The poems came out at Christmas, "full of errors." *The Diamond*, which he still called his best work, was either condemned or ignored. *The Tragedy in Sicily*, also published by Weber, had met an even more unfriendly fate.

The discussion of the stories may be conveniently postponed until their appearance in collected form, in 1855. We may now, however, attempt to gain some idea of the two brief essays and the new volume of poems.

The critical essays, the first of importance since the *Preface to Mary Magdalene*, are among the most satisfactory that Hebbel wrote. The involved and heavy structure of the *Preface* has been entirely abandoned, and the language, while losing nothing of its energy or compactness, is direct and clear. In the essay *On Style in the Drama*, about eight pages in length, he takes as his text the usual statement of the reviewers: The dialogue is smooth or the dialogue is heavy. This is, he declares, as good as saying nothing at all about the dialogue; it is in no sense a characterization of what the dialogue really is. What should one look for in dramatic speech? To answer this question he

lays down some general principles. Language is the most important element in all poetry. The plot and the characters always retain more or less abstract significance. In the language alone lies the infallible test. Here the real poet cannot hide his wealth nor the pretender disguise his poverty. A discerning eye can always distinguish the really individual style. What are its characteristics? We can discover two elements in language, the union of which forms its highest product: one is general, abstract, the genius of the language; the other is the individual genius. The synthesis of these two is individual style in poetry. The value of a language as a medium of spiritual expression depends on the freedom of movement left to the individual genius within the larger limits. The object of language is to reveal the spirit. In it the spirit appears in two forms: as thought and poetry (*denken und dichten*). Both of these forms begin with the sensuous image. The one by destroying its particularity rises to the concept; the other in retaining its particularity rises to the symbol. "Poetic style is, therefore, in its very basic elements a sensuous thing." Individual style in poetry must have sensuous energy, it must be old and new, unique and symbolic. Hebbel was pleased to find this view confirmed by Schiller also, in that poet's correspondence with Körner, which he reviewed at length in 1848-49.¹ In that review he speaks of the necessity of the poet, by his art, overcoming the tendency of language to be abstract.

Dramatic style has, however, special laws and conditions of its own. There everything depends on whether the thing is shown or a report is made about it. "Dramatic presentation gives the process in its full significance and accompanies everything, the persons, their affections, and their passions. . . . It shows life in its own peculiar form, the act of being born over again." In this respect it is the opposite of narrative, which has to do with something finished and is not concerned with transitions from one stage to another. A narrative style in the drama is only a pseudo-dramatic style which attempts to assume the aspects

¹ W. XI, p. 152, 169.

of real dialogue. This false style "will always be brief and empty. Brief, because it has only one line or a very few lines to draw; empty, because for fear of getting through too soon it adds to these all kinds of superfluous scrolls. Brevity is its virtue, and it can be accorded no greater praise than that of being smooth and terse. Very different is the case with dramatic presentation. At its every step there throngs around it a world of views and relations, which point both backwards and forwards, and all of which must be carried along; the life forces cross and destroy one another, the thread of thought snaps in two before it is spun out, the emotion shifts, the very words gain their independence and reveal a hidden meaning, annulling the ordinary one, for each is a die marked on more than a single face. Here the chaff of little sentences, adding bit to bit and fiber to fiber, would serve the purpose ill. It is a question of presenting conditions in their organic totality. . . . Unevenness of rhythm, complication and confusion of periods, contradiction in the figures, are elevated to effective and indispensable rhetorical means, however crude and cumbrous they may appear to the superficial eye, which does not recognize that the struggle for expression is also expression." It is, he concludes, "not without adequate inner reason, that Shakespeare rolls his dialogue in front of him, as does Sisypheus the stone," while Kotzebue's dialogue "dances and skips along elegantly, like a top before a boy's whip." These sentences are doubly worth quoting, first, for the truth they contain, and second, because in them is set the goal for Hebbel's efforts in his own dialogue. There is no better brief characterization of his dramatic language at its best than that contained in this little essay.

It was likewise not without reference to his own production that Hebbel wrote the next essay, on the relation between talent and consciousness in the poet. Too often he had been forced to hear that his works were intentional, that they were philosophy rather than poetry, that they lacked what was termed *naïveté*. At last he thought it worth while to say a word on this interesting subject. Throughout the five pages of his essay he makes use of the

terms *Kraft* and *Erkenntnis*, which may be approximately rendered by *talent* and *consciousness*. Does the poet know what he is about? Or is he like a child blindly doing certain things which mean more to the intelligent onlooker than to itself? Hebbel answers this last question decidedly in the negative. The state of "dull unconsciousness," which some critics imagine to be the so-called *naïveté* of the poetic process, is only the beginning of that process. In that state beauty is "conceived" but not "born." The creative process falls into two stages. The one may be subconscious, the other certainly is not. Consciousness, however, does not imply reflection, and this is indeed absent from the act of poetic creation. In another place, in which Hebbel approached the question from the opposite direction,² he declared that the characters, situations, and sometimes even the action in its anecdotal aspects sprang suddenly and unannounced out of the imagination; and that everything else was conscious. Whether he is using the word "conscious" in the same sense in both passages is not certain. In the *Diary* passage he seems to mean that everything connected with the material of the drama is unconscious, while the forming of it is conscious. Would then reflection have no place in this latter process? If not, how account for the importance Hebbel in many other statements attached to what he termed "artistic understanding?" We know that he valued this quality highly in Shakespeare, and himself claimed his share of it. We know that he attributed to it an indispensable, though negative, function. The understanding should ask but never answer. We see that Hebbel gave no systematic answer to the questions here implied. He approached the problem from particular points of view on separate occasions. No more does he attempt to analyze the conditions that precede those sudden and unannounced appearances of character and situation. He wrote this particular essay to defend himself, and to attack the "raft of poets whose so-called poetry rests upon their inability to think."³ The thrust was aimed also at

² T. II, 28.

³ Schiller's Correspondence with Körner, W. XI, p. 152.

those interpreters who imagined themselves to be wiser than the poet. For that reason they desired to make of him the playing child whose games they must explain. He reaches the conclusion that talent and consciousness each condition the other. The poet can both know what he does and do what he knows, a statement which, put in this form, seems more than doubtful.

The volume of poems to which reference has been made bore the title, *New Poems by Friedrich Hebbel*. A great many of them had been published already in different periodicals. The collection falls into three parts: Mixed Poems, Book of Sonnets, A Book of Epigrams.

The Mixed Poems embrace some with which we are already familiar. *Spring's Sacrifice* was the second poem in the collection. The first was one that Hebbel ranked with it in the scale of his production: *Love-Charm*. It is a kind of ballad, and has fine parts, though it seems somewhat labored in comparison with the effect it attains. Much more poetic are the verses inspired by the Sicilian Sisters, the poet's friends in Naples. They are made the subject of two poems, one a mere picture of how the writer, waiting in the evening to obtain a glimpse of his beautiful neighbors on their balcony, sees them kneel with their mother to do reverence to the Host, borne by a procession of priests. This little scene is described in the smoothly flowing Spanish rhythm so well used by the Romanticists—a southern meter to a southern theme. Diction and imagery are harmonious and sensuous. The poem is dreamy without being vague. In general Hebbel knew how to make a picture of this sort, to put in words the symphony of a situation. It requires not only a clear eye, but a delicate participation of the emotions. The human side of his pictures Hebbel usually furnishes from his speculative feelings, but in this case love provides the necessary warmth. The other poem, considerably longer, is based on a peculiar situation—the poet's position between the two sisters. The older possesses his heart, to her an indifferent offering. The younger, unfortunately, would give all to possess it. The flame was kindled in her heart by looks bestowed upon her but not

meant for her. They were meant for the reflection of her sister in her. The poet deplores the harm he has thus inadvertently done, and returning to his own grief regrets that he has ever loved before. For everything fades in comparison with his present love, which is genuine and unchangeable. Though perishing from the wounds he has received, he heaps the treasures of poetry on his beloved.

Some of the Copenhagen verses were included in the new collection, among the best being those inspired by Thorwaldsen's Ganymede and the eagle. The poems composed in Paris are more significant. From the standpoint of art, at least, this would not be true of the long poem already described: *The Departed Child to Its Mother*, which is more speculation than poetry. Of the highest value, on the other hand, are *The Walk in Paris* and *The Heath Lad*. These two poems, different as they are, show Hebbel's essential powers separate and distinct: the speculative poem and the dramatic ballad. His best dramas have the depth of the one and the tragic intensity of the other. The poet's mood in the *Walk* is unusually calm and bright. The harassing material cares of life, the bitter prayers to nature for annihilation—all this is temporarily forgotten. Whatever can make light and music in his soul takes possession of him, and the iron ring about him is shattered. "I felt what I might be and what I am, and eagerly I exchanged one for the other." Thus with assured consciousness and ease he expresses his impressions and reflections. The crowds, the distinguished men, the beautiful women, fine dresses, envious beggars, thronging booths, Cæsar, Napoleon—the whole amusing farce of life—sweeps past him in reality or in thought, leaving him detached and observant of its movements. Then the approach of night, the restaurant, a glass of wine and the newspaper. The first glance tells him of Thorwaldsen's death. "Now all the imperial thrones are vacant." Beethoven, Goethe, and now Thorwaldsen, the last who "struck Grecian fire from the marble!" Sadness overpowers him for the moment. Will the demigods return to earth, or have they gone forever?

From this depressing thought the poet turns away to say farewell to the spirit whose presence he feels near him.

The *Heath Lad* is perhaps Hebbel's most popular ballad. The idea is that of a murder announced in advance by a dream. The lad dreams that his master sends him over the lonely heath with money for some one in the next town. He comes in his dream to a willow-tree and is there murdered by a man who joins him on the way. In reality the next morning he is entrusted with the money, and sets out in great anxiety. His fear is his undoing. The heath is so lonely that he begs a shepherd to send his servant with him, because, he adds, he is afraid of being robbed of his money. When the servant appears the terrified boy recognizes in him the figure of his dream. The servant robs him, kills him, and leaves his body by the willow-tree. The story is told with swift intensity. The boy's anxiety, the deserted heath, the silent and uncanny companion—these effects are indelibly impressed on the mind of the reader.

Hebbel made use of the sonnet for the most serious purposes. To express the transitoriness of life, to interpret the beauty of painting or sculpture, to convey some of his poetic philosophy, and unfortunately, now and then, to versify an abstraction. Scarcely one of his sonnets is a love poem. Eduard Mörike well described them in the following words: "That speculative longing, which never ceases and should not cease to rule us, has found in these poems . . . very striking and general expression." Of the sonnets written in Italy, two celebrate the beauty of Roman women, two the beauty of antique art, and one the ruins of the eternal city. The sonnet entitled *Beauty* has already been mentioned, beauty being conceived of as the medium used by the Infinite to appear to men. This poem is not abstract, for beauty is here attributed to a person not named. The same cannot be said, however, of the lines on the *Criterion of Beauty*, which have little of the individual element of art. *The Two Drinkers* contains the same thought as the lines *To a Friend*, among the mixed poems: that is, take life as it comes without wasting time in the useless effort to unravel its mysteries. It is made up of

all its parts and cannot be otherwise embraced. The friend to whom the poet addresses this admonition was no other than himself. It was Hebbel the thinker to Hebbel the poet. A sonnet on *Language* is rather abstract, another on the position of the artist among men is more personal, coming as it does from his own experience. Here he remembers that inner wealth and power to express it should be considered full compensation for neglect. In *Double Warfare* he demands that the sham warfare among real poets should give way to real warfare on sham poets. We may make an end to this cataloguing by mentioning a sonnet to Christine Enghaus, written after their marriage. Just as the actress embodies the creations of the poet and gives them life, so he had hoped to give shape to the spirit of his times, "to lift it beyond itself through the quiet unfolding of new beauty." "But," he continues, "this Germany will scarcely inspire us, and before we know it we shall desist in vexation. Therefore let us reward each other." It was well for Hebbel that he had this consolation, for his fears were too well founded.

The epigrams of the edition of 1847 were arranged in miscellaneous order. When Hebbel published the complete edition of his poems in 1857, he not only doubled the number of epigrams but grouped them according to different subjects. Then in lines set at the head of the collection he briefly characterized the tone and contents of all that followed. Pictures caught in passing, thoughts complete in themselves, many an historical touch, now and then a breath which swells the heart and forsakes it again before a song is formed—in the midst of all this, though rarely, the heads of miscreants, as one sees the heads of owls or jackdaws nailed on barn-doors. But all in the verse that Goethe and Schiller made use of, though Platen and Voss despised it. Such is a paraphrase of these introductory lines. In the last sentence the poet means merely that he uses the pentameter in free German style.

To avoid repetition it is convenient to discuss all these epigrams together, without regard to the edition in which they appeared. And for the sake of greater definiteness

we may mention the main headings selected by the poet for each of his groups: Pictures, Gnomes, Art, History, Ethical, Personal, Miscellaneous. Hebbel's epigrams are genuine chips from his poetic block. They have little of the brilliancy of Martial. The subtle turn of expression, the swift irony, the sudden smile of mockery are generally absent. Social satire was not Hebbel's affair. Not only is the group of epigrams on art a large one; many of these verses deal with abstract subjects, such as genius and talent, master and bungler, the German language, verse and prose, form and content, imitation of nature, the Dutch school. Humor is not lacking. But it is not the polished, urbane sort, it is rather the grim humor of Hagen. In the whole collection the prevailing tone is serious, and every step we make is repaid by some memorable and, usually, well put idea.

Here again it is in the pictures that Hebbel excels. Let us see a few of them. The Duke of Augustenberg is being carried to his grave. Great throngs of interested people follow the procession. Are they sad? Not at all. Each is bent on his own pleasure. A great wave of life surges around death. Humanity is immortal. Here is an old man reckoning that he still has twenty years before he will be a hundred. Here is a child asking its nurse to have the emperor buried the next day. Only the poet sees the dead man's white face and closed eyes—until a girl he knows greets him with a smile. Perhaps the two finest pictures as such are *A Neapolitan Scene* and *The Sicilian Ropedancer*. The first: A blacksmith is hammering away busily in his shop, when a mendicant friar approaches him. The man gives him the penny earned by his early labor, and the monk offers twofold thanks, the image of the Madonna to be kissed, and his snuff-box for a pinch. The second: The pretty little rope-dancer takes her collection in front of the booth. Contrasting with her red dress she wears a chain of white corals about her neck. In dancing she has broken one of the beads, and being a mere child looks to her sister for comfort. But the latter turns her back angrily and throws her tambourine into the air so that it bursts.

"Alas," concludes the poet, "I can understand her! She has lost something more precious, and your childish sorrow for the broken bead, mirroring, as it does, the flawless purity of your soul, reminds her of your possession and her loss." It is also evident that Hebbel was captivated by the natural beauty of Italy. Italy, he says, like Heliogabalus smothers her guests with flowers. Rome is assured by the skies above it of being the eternal city. The Colosseum with the cross—though that alone saved it from the hand of the barbarian—reminds him of a slain giant with a branded forehead, a thought similar to that which had once made Grillparzer's way hard in Austria. Upon the Capitol he feels the presence of the greatest Roman of them all:

Cesar uncovered his head, though he had no Cesar to honor!

That is the least I can do, now that his spirit is here.

Most of the Gnomes are in two lines, none over four. They nearly all contain interesting ideas and truths, but few have the necessary pithiness for the epigram. In his epigrams on art, apart from those of a more general nature, Hebbel expresses ideas that have been made familiar during the course of our discussion. He upholds the dignity of true workmanship, the severity of art as a mistress, while scoring the utilitarian practises of the journalists and their kin. His epigram on form and content is but the reaffirmation of his teachings, that the Infinite must be mirrored in the individual form of art. How can the sun be painted better than in the trees and flowers? The old feud with philosophy is not left out of account—

System swallows up system—but see, together with Shakespeare,

Homer is walking along, young and fresh as the morn!

But his deadliest shafts he directs against those whom he names the "secondary people," that is, the imitators, those who would not invent art if it were not already invented. He takes their word for it that they have to write, but adds

that the world does not have to read. "If you are a beggarly fellow, my friend, don't become a poet. The most that you could accomplish would be to develop into a knave." Striking deeper at the root of the tree is the epigram written "after reading the obituary of a German poet"—

Most unfortunate nation, the German—with so many talents,

Which it possesses in none, loses, however, in each!

When he addresses those whom he respects, he gives some genuine advice. The poet's lot has its bitterness, which must be feared. If he cannot endure blame for the best he does and praise for the worst, he may as well shatter his lyre in the beginning. Or if he scatters pearls he should not sorrow when the hail covers them up—the sun will lay them bare again. Or this other test is proposed—

Poet, notice this thing, that beauty thrives on abundance. If you have nothing too much, that is too little you have.

We cannot conclude our very brief review of some of the general ideas found in this group of epigrams, without calling special attention to Hebbel's characterization of modern comedy. "Would you like to know," he says, "why we have no real comedy? Because among us moderns it has been swallowed up by tragedy. Individuals as such are comical. To make them more so is to make caricatures." This idea, that modern comedy by exploring the individual, encroaches on the sphere of tragedy, is of interest in relation to the new ideal of tragedy that he hoped to exemplify more and more in his future works.

The historical epigrams are few in number. The best of them show the poet's reaction against the narrow and oppressive leadership of his times. "Frederic the Great," he says, "tried to discover the art of not sleeping. Others have discovered the art of never waking up." Or, "Stop your watch, and imagine that the evening will not come! Did the sun ever stop because the sexton commanded it?" Seldom has the point of view of mere bureaucracy been more

incisively given than in the lines entitled "Tiberius' Answer." They run as follows: "Great Cæsar, you had Jesus Christ crucified, but his teaching lives, yes, it is spread abroad." "That is merely Pilate's mistake. For if he had crucified the twelve Apostles too, the whole thing would have been done away with forever." And so in other epigrams the poet stands for freedom of the press, and satirizes the everlasting guardianship exercised over the people.

The general lines of conduct prescribed in the ethical epigrams are clearly drawn. The central point from which they may be regarded as produced is moral courage and honesty. This courage is necessary first of all in our dealing with ourselves. We must have the courage to recognize our position in our own circle, and the position of our circle in the larger sphere of things. Thus only can we overcome the evil quality of egotism. In the second place, we must have the courage of our convictions. Hebbel was a firm champion of moral and intellectual freedom, whether that was threatened by force or by subtler foes, such as flattery and friendship. His first demand was: Occupy no half-way standpoint. Be something out and out. What this had cost him in the way of journalistic support alone has already been explained. "Truth," he says, "will cost you at most your fortune, but falsehood will cost you yourself." "Do what you will, you will not avoid enemies, but . . . you can arm yourself for the struggle. Make yourself so truly the bearer of what is good, beautiful and true, that no one can fight you without wounding the gods." Whether in the ethical or esthetic sphere, the poet had come to demand greater and greater severity with oneself. In these demands we see reflected the author of the dramas. For their conflicts are ethical conflicts, and their heroes and heroines are tried by an absolute inner standard. That Hebbel regarded his own works from this point of view is shown in what he says about them: "They are too moral! For their moral severity we are unfortunately too far removed from Paradise, and we are not yet near enough to the last judgment with its consuming flames."

The personal epigrams are few in number, compara-

tively speaking, and no attempt will be made to describe their very miscellaneous contents. Hebbel included several rimed epigrams in his collection, one of which, in the edition of 1848, bore the peculiar title: *Appendix to the Epigrams, Prologue to these Poems*. This is the parable of the old man whom the poet meets on the road and to whom he begins to sing. He soon notices, however, that the old man is deaf, so he tries to explain his meaning to him by means of signs. But he sees now that the old man is also blind. Hoping to approach him in some way he hands him a rose to smell. But the old man has no sense of smell. Losing his patience, he presses one of the thorns into the old man's flesh. But that too has no effect. Perhaps the old man is dead!

CHAPTER X

THE REVOLUTION. *Herod and Mariamne*

ON March the first, 1848, Hebbel entered these words in his *Diary*: "The third French revolution is here. Louis Philippe has been dethroned, the Republic established! With what significance this event is fraught!" And just two weeks later he wrote again: "I am now living in another Austria, in an Austria in which I am more secure than Prince Metternich, in which freedom of the press has been proclaimed . . . and a constitution promised." Austria, suffering under Metternich for a long period of time a reactionary absolutism almost unparalleled, had at last begun to awake. The revolution in Vienna was a tame affair, compared with Paris or Berlin. It was led mainly by students, some of whom were among the first few victims. The people were moderate in their demands, which were conceded at first without much opposition. The revolution was directed more against the advisers of the feeble Emperor Ferdinand than against himself, though there was an ultra-radical party demanding a republic. These and other well known facts need no repetition here. Hebbel's position, however, during these stormy days is of considerable interest to us. The main source of our information on this subject consists of the letters written by him for the *Augsburg Allgemeine Zeitung*, on conditions in Vienna between March and December, 1848. Something may also be found in his *Diary* and *Letters*.

Before the revolution Hebbel was taken to be a radical, but almost immediately after it he was condemned by that party as a reactionary. He was thus misunderstood by both sides. What he desired was a constitutional monarchy, a government that would take the people into its confidence. He made this demand over and over again in his censure of the government's Hungarian policy. He was

an outspoken opponent of the absolutism that prevailed before March. But he was not swept off his feet by radical demands. He looked on the revolutionary movement with the eye of the dramatist. Whatever abuses had originated and found protection under the old order, an order that had condemned his works as immoral and closed its theaters to them, he knew that nothing could be gained by overthrowing all traditions and reverting to chaos. Austria, he thought, was ready for a constitution, but not for a republic. Whether that might come later or would be desirable, is left an open question in his correspondence. His position was defined in the following comparison: the circle of freedom must coincide with the circle of education. Unless this is the case, either revolution or barbarism will result sooner or later. He found examples of both in Vienna at the time. "What asses!" he writes to Röscher, "are leading these revolutionists? It is incredible! I do not admire Napoleon half as much as I used to. His game was a great deal easier than I thought." Hebbel's letters show that he had done considerable reading on the main issues, such as the press laws and the constitution. He was not for absolute freedom of the press, because he feared its abuse by demagogues. At the same time he realized the danger of any regulation.

This attitude, of radical among the conservatives, and conservative among the radicals, he upheld with courage, regardless of the unpopularity, or even danger, to which it exposed him. His active share in events is also worthy of mention. As a candidate for the imperial parliament in Frankfort he was defeated, due, it is said, to his Holstein accent. His nationality, which he tried in vain to change, prevented him from running for the Austrian assemblies. But he was a member of some important committees. And when the Emperor fled from Vienna to the more loyal Innsbruck in Tyrol, Hebbel was one of four nominated as a commission to request him, in the name of the city, to return. This expedition, of which he has left an interesting account, met with little real success.

Vienna's famous Burgtheater was also compelled to

recognize the new spirit. The director Holbein, says Hebbel, in trying to keep pace with the revolution, "chased the whole of modern literature over the stage in a storm before the astonished eyes of Old Austria." It was as if a "gouty person should suddenly get Saint Vitus dance." Hebbel profited by this movement. *Mary Magdalene* was given at the Burg on May 8, and repeated a number of times with success. Before March, as the poet says, the censorship would have refused it because its title reminded one of the Bible. This was no exaggeration, not even irony. *Judith* also found an enthusiastic welcome, with Christine Hebbel in the title rôle. In April of the following year (1849), the new drama on which he had been engaged since February, 1847, was performed. It failed signally, though in many respects it is one of Hebbel's greatest works.

The sources of this new tragedy, *Herod and Mariamne*, were, needless to say, the *Jewish Wars* and the *Antiquities* of Josephus. The theme was old among poets. In Josephus, Hebbel found essentially the following story. Herod the Great, while outwardly successful in all his undertakings, is more and more embittered by dissensions within his own family. His wife is the beautiful Mariamne, the last of the Maccabean women. Mariamne's mother, Alexandra, is his worst enemy, and endeavors to use against him the office of high priest, into which she has forced her son, Aristobulus. The King, fearing the growing popularity of the young High Priest, has him drowned. Alexandra appeals to Antony for justice, and Herod is summoned to Egypt to answer the charge of murder. Expecting death and unwilling to leave Mariamne behind in the world with an Antony, he gives his brother-in-law, Joseph, a secret command to kill her in event of his death. Mariamne discovers this secret from Joseph, and reproaches her husband with it upon his return. According to the *Jewish War*, Herod thereupon suspects Mariamne and Joseph and has both executed. But in the *Antiquities* he is convinced of his wife's innocence and spares her life. Just before he has to leave for the battle of Actium, he gives the same command to Soemus, who reveals it in the hopes of winning

Mariamne's favor. Herod returns, Soemus' betrayal is discovered in the course of time, and both he and Mariamne are put to death. Herod loses his mind for a time. Upon his recovery he is more tyrannical than ever, and has many of his relations and friends executed. Throughout the account his violent passion for Mariamne is emphasized, as well as his jealousy of her. After the murder of her brother she has no more love for him, and also no longer believes in his love for her—a very natural feeling, which Hebbel had some difficulty in modifying to suit his purpose.

With accustomed resolution the poet attacked this material and moulded it to a well defined end. Everything is made to center around Herod's gradual transition from a great king to a desperate tyrant. Between his two central figures the poet imagines a relation the highest possible in human life. As Herod conceives it:

Two souls that love each other as they should love
Could never bear each other to outlive.
If I on some far battle field had fallen,
You would not need a courier's announcing,
You'd feel that on the instant death had happened
And woundless die in sentience of mine.¹

In Mariamne's soul this ideal lives in equal purity, while Herod kills it in himself. That is the tragic theme in its chief personal aspect. The drama opens as this process of disintegration in Herod's mind has well begun, and it leads us gradually to the point where, in spite of Mariamne's struggle to prevent it, their beautiful relation is but a shadow of what it was.

The character of Herod furnishes perhaps the most convenient point from which to begin in discussing the tragedy. Herod is introduced to us at the height of his career, and we see him hesitating at a point from which he might have advanced even higher, though he actually descends. We see how this descent is the resultant of two

¹ Three plays by Friedrich Hebbel, translated by L. H. Allen, Everyman's Library, p. 154.

forces, his own nature, and the circumstances he has to face. As to the first of these elements, he is a strong ruler, a dominant personality, who has won his way to the throne and maintains himself there by his energy and boldness. Up to the present a natural openness has marked his course, and whether friend or foe he has been equally worthy of admiration. He had begun with a great dream of what a strong ruler might accomplish. He would break down the narrow provincialism of his people and lead them out into a freer atmosphere. Jerusalem should become a little Rome. Thus he pitted himself against the Jews in their most unassailable fortress, that of their religious customs. To such a conflict there could be only one end—his own destruction. It is no mere outward catastrophe that overtakes him. In him we see the disintegration of a soul. The more his power unfolds from without, the more empty is his life from within. He wins the favor of the Roman, but with it the hatred of his subjects. He is enriched with new provinces, but deprived of the love and respect of his wife.

Herod's chief enemy is in his own house, Alexandra, his wife's mother. She incites the fanatical Pharisees against him, she tries to weaken his hold upon Mariamne's love, she would even sacrifice her daughter to the passions of Antony in order to bring Herod to his downfall. Thus beset with innumerable hidden foes, Herod comes into a bitter and defiant mood. Comparing himself with the man in the fable, attacked by the lion in front, the tiger from behind, serpents from beneath, and the eagle from above, he firmly resolves to lose nothing he has called his own. He takes the fatal resolution "to meet each enemy with his own weapon." Already the subtle effect of deceit appears in his actions. He is irritable and suspicious. He walks the streets at night in disguise, and he orders the death of a treacherous slave with a touch of personal hatred.

Suspicious of everyone else, he soon begins to be suspicious of Mariamne. His distrust of her begins when he causes the death of her brother. Though this was done in self-defense, the manner in which it was done was entirely unworthy of him. He not only denied it, he confirmed his

hypocrisy by mourning for the dead. He does not appear before his wife with the clear conscience of an impartial judge. She resents his robes of mourning and the pearls with which he showers her more lavishly than before. This attitude shakes her confidence more than the actual deed, terrible as it was, for which she holds Alexandra chiefly responsible. And in her resentment, Herod finds new reason to suspect that her love for him is destroyed. Therefore, in his blind infatuation, he demands from her, on the eve of a journey from which he may not return, a promise of voluntary death in that event. She recognizes the folly of such a promise, as well as the doubt that his wish implies. Therefore she refuses it as unworthy of their relation. In this Herod sees a confirmation of his fears, and in pursuance of his determination to hold what is his own at any cost, he leaves behind the fatal command. Thus the deceitful forces opposing him, together with the dominant egotism of his own soul, lead him into a complete confusion of spiritual values, and he can no longer see the futility of using force to keep possession of his wife, a possession lost only by his efforts to retain it.

In this and subsequent scenes between the two principal characters, Hebbel had a very difficult problem to solve. There are moments when a single impulsive outburst of love on the part of either would at once clear up every misunderstanding, which is preserved only by the insistence of each on a particular point. Mariamne intends to die if her husband meets death, but she conceals her intention because he demands the sacrifice. A word from her would satisfy him, but he cannot have faith without that assurance. Hebbel has often been reproached with having here created unnatural persons and an unnatural situation. Under ordinary conditions this would be true. But he does not present his characters to us under ordinary conditions. Both of them are in a peculiarly sensitive state of mind. Each expects a concession and encounters a demand. Mariamne, having stood the severest test of her love in the death of her brother, now finds that love doubted. Herod, on the other hand, is suspicious and jealous, and hence sees

in her every word only what he expects and fears. Her restraint he mistakes for coldness, her warning, for an attempt to deceive. His deed avenges itself, and in spite of all both may do or say, it is the ghost of Aristobulus that stands between them.

By the end of the first act the dramatic theme is clearly defined. The second act shows us the plottings of Alexandra with the fanatical Sameas against the absent King, and especially Mariamne's discovery of Joseph's secret. Joseph believes that if Herod dies at Antony's hands and Alexandra and Mariamne come to power through Antony's influence, his own life will be endangered because of his supposed share in Aristobulus' death. Being therefore eager to kill both of his enemies as soon as the time arrives, he ruins everything by his too great zeal. He arouses the suspicion of Mariamne and the foolish jealousy of Salome, his wife. His miscalculation is fatal, and just when he is preparing to strike, Herod returns. In the streets the King finds an open riot, in the palace an indignant wife and a jealous sister. Without a word he has Joseph beheaded for, as he supposes, betraying his secret, and then faces Mariamne in a vain attempt to justify his actions. In the midst of this, the third act, a messenger arrives summoning Herod to Antony's aid at the battle of Actium. Mariamne regards this as a miracle, as another lease on love, a chance for him to make good his past wrong. But in keeping with her proud nature, she leaves him to find his own solution. She restrains her feelings in the hope that he will understand them of himself and thus fully meet the test. But Herod is further from this than before. He repeats his offense, this time selecting Soemus for the executioner. And again he misses his reckoning. Soemus, a generous and loyal friend, receives the cunning commission with amazement and abhorrence. The fact that he expresses neither measures his estimate of the change that has come over Herod. Recognizing the futility of a protest, he hopes at least to save Mariamne from another executioner, and is silent. When he feels assured of Herod's death he reveals his secret to the Queen—a sign of the respect, or even the love,

he has for her. In his delineation of Soemus, Hebbel reinforces his main theme and gives the drama a broader significance. Again, with singular fortune, involving no sacrifice of his loyalty, Herod escapes death in the catastrophe at Actium, is taken into Octavius' favor, and returns to Jerusalem with greater prestige than ever before. But his own happiness is lost beyond recall. The fourth act shows us these events, with the sentence of death upon Soemus, while the fifth brings the trial and execution of Mariamne, with Herod's subsequent discovery of her innocence, and his own despair.

If Mariamne were a saint, like Genoveva, the tragic situation would find a less pointed expression. But she is no saint, nor is she meant to be one. She is fully conscious of what is due her, whether as a beautiful woman, or a queen by birth and position. She does not leave her jewels unworn nor her power unused. She disdains deception of every kind, defies her mother, openly despises Herod's sister, Salome, and her husband, the timid Joseph. Her feelings are deep and locked in her heart. "She cannot weep—her drawn face tells what in others finds the vent of tears."² She is the woman to die with her husband, just as she is the woman to resent any forcing of her will in such an issue. Her temperament must doubly feel an injury such as is done her. The poet has gifted her with his swift intelligence, which cannot be deceived, and with an inflexible moral character, which cannot be turned aside from its course. She is possessed of the surest feelings for what is going on about her. It is in vain that Herod erects hedges of secrecy around his order for her execution. Joseph is a mere plaything in her hands. Before he is aware of it he has so involved himself in contradictions, that no course remains to him but open confession. That scene is a masterpiece of unconscious self-revelation of a lower to a higher intelligence. But the most imposing thing in Mariamne is her unswerving fidelity to her love as long as there is the slightest hope of saving it, and after that to her own sense of

² Allen: Hebbel's Plays.

what is her necessary course of action. Over and over she attempts to recall Herod to himself again, she hopes against hope, and seems at times almost deliberately to close her eyes in self-deception. Among the most touching situations in the drama, is where her confidence in Herod's better self gains strength on the eve of his second departure. The spectator cannot be in doubt as to the King's intended action, and if doubt were possible the last vestige is speedily destroyed. It is in vain that Mariamne keeps Soemus out of her presence, for the very fear that he might have a secret which she knows would mean her death. Nothing can stay the moment that is approaching, when she learns with certainty that all is lost, that in Herod's eyes she has been a mere possession, and for her the present, past, and future are swallowed up in nothingness.

Hebbel has been much criticised for following the account of the *Antiquities* and including in his tragedy the repetition of the fatal command. But he had very good reasons for doing that. In the second command is a motive entirely absent in the first. Herod wishes to make a direct test of Mariamne's fidelity. She had refused to defend herself against the blind jealousy of Salome, and Herod's mind, poisoned as it was, was unable to quiet all suspicion. In selecting Soemus he supposed he had a man whom he could trust absolutely. If his wife enticed the secret from Soemus, it could be, he imagined, only at the sole price of herself. This motive is the most effective means the poet could have used to portray the progressive degradation of Herod's character. It also makes clear the necessity of Mariamne's inexorable course at the end. And if there was any risk of losing interest through repetition, Hebbel has more than avoided that. By skilful variation of the scenes he gains suspense at every point.

Mariamne's final revenge is terrible. All the fury of a wounded love bursts forth, so much the more irresistible in its sweep as it proceeds from a deep and passionate nature. As Hebbel says, at the end her love borrows the form of hate. Herod has suspected her of infidelity, he shall see her in reality as he has seen her in his mind. Others may

believe in his death. She knows his resourcefulness too well. She prepares a brilliant festival at which she dances with Soemus. No one comprehends her actions. She seems to be celebrating her husband's death. In this situation the King finds her. He believes at first that his messenger has come before him and that his return is being honored. But Mariamne's words and actions at once dispel this hope, which gives place to rage in his heart. The poet never created a scene of more threatening aspect and more dramatic solution than Mariamne's festival and dance, when bitter woe is forced for the time to take on the mask of wild revelry. The one object she desires is gained—her death sentence at her husband's hands.

After her execution, the King, through the testimony of Titus and Alexandra, awakens to the realization of her innocence. This discovery falls on him with crushing force. Mariamne's death destroys the last trace of human kindness in his heart. His renewed determination to hold what he has left is but a vain attempt to drown his own despair. The tragedy closes with an ironical glance into the future. Three Kings from the East enter to inquire about a wonderful child of the race of David, who is to become King. Herod, failing to obtain definite information from them, sends out his men to slay all children born in that year. A last futile effort to hold by violence what he possesses. As nothing in Mariamne's life had been able to recall him to his better self, so her death cannot. Much in him was noble and good, but tyranny has degraded him until his ruin is complete.

Hebbel did not intend, in this drama, to write the tragedy of individuals alone, but that of an epoch in human history. Tyranny is self-destructive in Herod, as despotism is self-destructive in Herod's age. In him and with him we see the old order decay. Mariamne and Soemus relinquish their lives for a principle in harmony, at least, with the new spirit that was ushered in so quietly at the close of Herod's dominion. In them the value of the soul is vindicated, and an indestructible boundary established between people and things. The connection between this thought and the

thought of to-day needs no emphasis, and the poet, whose words sounded strange to his own generation, became a prophet for the next.

Hebbel declared that this drama was the first of his works entirely in harmony with his stage of development at the time of composition. In more than one place he dated from its production a new epoch in his literary life. The first period, he writes in a letter to Saint René Taillandier, "extends from *Judith* to *Herod*, and embraces the time of struggle. The second extends from *Herod* till the present time (August, 1852), and had a forerunner in my lyric poetry. The works of the first period are, to be sure, volcanic and sanguinary, but the fire is genuine . . . and the blood is my own . . . The works of the second period move in a different sphere and prove, I hope, that my struggle was not in vain." The ideal in Hebbel's mind during his work on *Herod and Mariamne* is definitely stated by him in a letter to Kühne (March, 1850). "In this work I have attempted in the strictest sense to carry out the conception of necessity, . . . and of a necessity which, as is fitting in the historical tragedy, proceeds simultaneously from inner and outer conditions. In so doing I have set myself the task of making the form as simple as possible, of subduing both the larger historical masses that form the factors of the psychological process, and also the details of secondary persons and situations. For I am convinced that from the style of Shakespeare and that of the Greeks a middle term must be obtained." Hebbel believed that Shakespeare's wealth of detail was a fault in composition, which might be pardoned in him alone, whereas the Greek form, on the other hand, did not provide sufficiently for the development of character. He seems to have been striving for the simplicity, directness, and clear perspective of the one form, without sacrificing to too great an extent the depth and passion of the other. If we compare, for example, his treatment of the populace of Jerusalem with his treatment of the populace of Bethulia in *Judith*, we see what he means. In one case the people are brought before us at length, in the other we only feel their presence in the back-

ground as a persistent and ominous threat. So the Three Kings pass before us like "wax figures," as Bamberg observed, with Hebbel's full approval. The main scenes were to be full and vivid, the rest vanishing, so that the "divine antagonist," that is, the representative of the Universal, could have more room.

Thus what Otto Ludwig³ condemns in *Julia*, as an effort to combine the three most irreconcilable elements: modern theme, antique simplicity, and vivid characterization, Hebbel does actually make his goal, though the material is no longer modern in the sense that *Julia* is. And with customary decision he stakes his whole future on the conviction that this goal is unique in the history of the drama.

The new work, as we have seen, failed completely at its only presentation in April, 1849. Its reception by the critics was not much more appreciative. Hebbel consoled himself with the idea that his tragedy was too new and too compact for the audience to comprehend at once, all the more so as the public had become less and less accustomed to see a drama as an organic whole. It has never become one of his most popular works.

³ *Gesammelte Schriften*, Leipzig 1891, Vol. V, p. 358.

CHAPTER XI

SOME DISAPPOINTMENTS. HEINRICH LAUBE AND THE CRITICS

BY May, 1849, another work had been finished, under the title of *The Ruby*. This was the dramatization of a fairy-tale of the poet's own invention, belonging to a period of more than ten years past. It had already been published in prose form (1843). In tone and incident it places us in the world of the *Arabian Nights*. The scene is laid in Bagdad, the main persons are a Sultan, Fatima, his daughter, one of the benevolent genii, and the hero, Assad. Fatima has been changed by an evil magician into a ruby, and from this form she can be released only by the simplest and yet the most unlikely condition, that the person happening to possess the ruby throw it away. How circumstances bring Assad into this possession and finally lead him to the solution, is the theme of the story. The dramatization is not very successful, and we lay the work aside feeling that Hebbel is out of his proper sphere. For this type his talent lacked the necessary vivacity. Vienna especially was accustomed through its own poets to more color and a lighter fancy in such works. The serious North German was no match for the versatile extravagance of Raimund, who wrote with the abandon of Shakespeare. The Ruby was given three times at the Burgtheater and then withdrawn as a failure. Unfortunately Hebbel reviewed the performance in the *Imperial News* (Reichszeitung), the *Literary Review* of which he was then editing, and while conceding that everything had been done by actors and management to give his work a fair chance, he could not refrain from suggesting that the public possibly was not far enough advanced to appreciate it. His enemies were not slow to use this opportunity. They ridiculed him and accused him of arrogance and conceit, and a number of verses found wide circulation in the papers, under the significant title: *God Hebbel to the Stupid Public*.

While his enemies were thus rejoicing over him, Hebbel was working on a drama which it must forever be regretted that he did not finish: *Moloch*. The first act had been done in 1849, the second in 1850, and though the remaining parts are more or less fragmentary scenes and notes, these two acts alone are more valuable than the completed *Julia* and *Ruby* together. As the name indicates, the hero of this work is the iron god of Carthage. Its plan is one of the boldest ever conceived, and even the partial execution reveals an undertaking of grand proportions. *Moloch* was to symbolize the birth of religion in the human race, the transition from barbarism to civilization, a theme Hebbel had been busied with since 1837. Only the opening scenes of the play were published, in Kühne's *Europa* (1847), and met with almost universal condemnation, 'due perhaps to their fragmentary condition.

After the destruction of Carthage by Rome, the aged Hieram, accompanied by a number of sailors and bearing the huge image of Moloch, escapes in a ship to the shores of Thule. He himself has no faith in the image, because of its failure to aid Carthage in the death struggle against her enemies, but he intends to use it as a means in accomplishing his object among the uncivilized inhabitants of Thule. These he is determined to inspire with a hatred of Rome. In order to make his arrival the more mysterious, he has the ship destroyed and kills all his companions in their sleep. One, however, he spares, and sacrifices him before the image just as the barbarians enter the grove where it stands. The King's son, Teut, sees in these strange visitors a fulfilment of his dreams, and he is hence immediately won over to Hieram's cause. It is he who overthrows the stubborn opposition of his mighty father, the old Teut, and prevents the destruction of Hieram and the statue. The old King retires in sullen anger to a cave, where he dwells apart, attended alone by Theoda, a young girl whom his son loves.

Hieram now establishes the sacred grove of Moloch and surrounds the god with deep mystery. Besides himself no one is allowed to enter the divine precincts, on pain of being immediately struck down by supernatural means, and he

claims to receive each night the revelations which he writes down in a book. The young King is instructed in the art of reading, so that he can see these communications with his own eyes. Hieram teaches the Teutons to cut down their forests, to cultivate grain, and to plant fruit-trees of all kinds. This knowledge, which he has brought with him from Carthage, he disseminates as the continual revelation of Moloch. In a few years the country and people are transformed, and Hieram's power is at its highest point. So much of the drama is complete in the first two acts.

The remainder of the plan is more or less clearly discernible. Theoda, hunting a stag at night, enters the sacred grove unawares, and there sees the dreaded image with Hieram asleep at its feet. The priest, having discovered her presence, and fearing that she will betray him, demands her death at Teut's hands under the pretense of divine will. The young king, accustomed to follow Hieram in everything, gives his consent, but at the last moment finds himself unable to carry out the command. From Theoda he learns of her escape from the sacred grove and resolves to test the matter for himself. In this way he discovers the deception that Hieram has been practising on him and his people. From here on the outlines grow fainter. Hieram has apparently been waiting for the moment when he can step forth from his mask and reveal to the people the true connection of events. When Teut calls him to account, he is so angered at the blindness of his favorite disciple as to lose himself for the moment and strike the image of Moloch as if to break it in pieces. But the Moloch cult has gone beyond his control, it has made so deep an impression on the people that he is unable to deprive it of its supernatural influence. He has in reality become what he pretended to be—the servant of Moloch. All of this is merely suggested. Nowhere has it taken on real form. Hebbel's intention seems to have been to let Hieram return to his old faith in the power symbolized by the idol. At any rate, the Priest casts himself into the sea as a voluntary expiation for his effort to shatter the image.

The young King, however, whose faith has been broken,

goes to liberate his father, and acknowledge that he was in the wrong from the first. The old man accepts his offer, and comes forth from his seclusion, determined to punish his son's rebellion with death. But he is struck with wonder by the change that has come over the country, and exclaims: "My son, there are gods! Could we have accomplished this?" And thus the Moloch cult is established more firmly than before.

Apart from slight suggestions received perhaps from Hoffmann and Zacharias Werner, the unique conception underlying this fragment is an invention of Hebbel, and the execution is successful as far as it extends.* The most impressive figure is that of Hieram, who dominates the scene with his inexorable will. His monstrous act in the slaughter of his companions assumes, under the influence of his words and manner, a sort of terrible sublimity, as if it were sanctioned by a higher power, and the supernatural qualities which he ascribes to Moloch seem to inhere in his own mind. The awe with which the barbarians regard him is easily comprehensible.

The *Moloch* fragment is Hebbel's best expression of his feelings about religion. He had claimed, without much foundation to be sure, to have symbolized the Jewish religion in *Judith*, and Christianity in *Genoveva*, in their historical significance. He had come much nearer indicating the importance of the dawn of Christianity in *Herod and Mariamne*. But in *Moloch* he gave expression, in a sense, to the universal religious feeling of the race. He lent great emphasis to this expression by employing a helpless image and a barbarous service, for Moloch demanded human sacrifices. Yet, in spite of all this, it met a fundamental need of the people who worshipped it, and thus grew into a symbol of a power at the same time within them and above them. He thus assumed the existence of such a religious consciousness in

* Since this book went to press, Professor Lessing has called the author's attention to the striking similarity in idea between *Moloch* and Klinger's *Medea auf dem Kaukasus*. Both writers portray the elemental power of religion, though Klinger is concerned with its *destructive* tendencies.

man, independent of the particular objects to which it may attach itself. And the awakening of this consciousness marks the beginning of civilization, according to this work. Would man ever outgrow this state, or had he perhaps already outgrown it? Hebbel once suggested the possibility of this, and as far as he was personally concerned, art was his religion, if such an expression may be allowed.

Hebbel's attitude to religion has been variously discussed. He has himself summed up the matter in letters to his friend, the poet Friedrich Uechtritz, and in others to Pastor Luck, letters written, however, some years after the Moloch fragment. They all present the same standpoint. In his opinion there were three ways of approaching the Infinite—religion, philosophy, and art. His way was art. Just as he never formulated a definite philosophy, so he had no precise religion. He regarded Christianity as a symbol, just as Moloch was a symbol. It was, of course, a far higher and more adequate symbol, it embodied much more of that primal religious feeling in the human breast, but it was not to be identified with absolute religion. Hebbel saw that the issue in modern times was not about this or that religion, but about all religion. Are we, with our spiritual pretensions, after all merely another illustration of the inexorable laws of nature? Hebbel understood what the teaching of Feuerbach meant, or perhaps he was more alarmed by the soulless materialism of Feuerbach's disciples. At any rate, he took his stand against the whole movement. At bottom he was a mystic, if that means a denial of reason as the revealer of supreme truth. He took his stand for spiritualism, in these letters, on the fact of conscience. Conscience, he thinks, cannot be explained as the mere instinct of race preservation. The universal element of conscience is: avoid evil, do good. This has nothing to do with the particular conceptions of good and evil, which of course vary with the circumstances. Conscience, therefore, is his guarantee that "there is a place where the unapproachable abyss of the world . . . can be plainly perceived, and that is the human breast." But every attempt to solve the riddle of the world, whether by dogma or

reason, "is a tragedy of thought." We can never see the heart of the world, and each should be allowed to interpret the pulse-beat for himself. In this figure he expresses his final conviction that belief should be free. Art has this advantage, he thinks, over both religion and philosophy, that it does not attempt to explain the mystery of life, but to symbolize it. Just what he meant by this, we shall see later in our discussion of his views on realism.

Conscious all the while of the purest motives in what he had undertaken, Hebbel saw himself consistently opposed, sometimes in good faith, but, as he believed, more often maliciously. He had recognized the importance of the reviewers and the critics as mediators between the author and the public, and had done what he could in honor to win them. It had been in vain. Characteristically he began to seek the deeper meaning of this state of affairs. The result was a pretty two-act drama, entitled *Michelangelo*, written down in about thirty days near the close of 1850. This work, while it was naturally taken to be an answer to his enemies, he meant to be an answer to a much larger question—why genius meets with opposition.

Michelangelo has finished a statue of Jupiter in entire secrecy. The Duke comes to order just such a piece of work. During their conversation he taunts the sculptor with his supposed unwillingness to learn from the Greeks, and his arrogance in imagining himself superior to them. *Michelangelo*, vexed with the insincerity and injustice of such criticism, which he has been forced too often to hear, resolves to give the Duke and his other detractors a lesson. That night he has his Jupiter buried in secret on the Capitoline Hill, where he knows excavations will be made on the morrow. First, however, he takes the precaution to darken the marble and break off an arm, which he keeps in his possession. When the statue is found, the Duke comes with various well known artists and critics, who go into raptures over the new discovery, and dispute with one another about its date and author. *Michelangelo*, when summoned, is reserved in his comments. This is interpreted by his critics as jealousy, and the Duke challenges him to replace even

the lost arm if he can. If he can do that he shall receive the price of the whole figure. Thereupon he draws the arm from beneath his cloak and fits it to the statue. His enemies are thus confounded by the truth. He explains to them the shortcomings of his work in comparison with the Greek masters, and then bursts into a passionate discourse upon the envy and jealousy nourished by the mediocre against men of talent. It is the duty of each to recognize those above him, and he gladly bows to the genius of a Phidias, but it is no less his duty to exact recognition from those below him. With this defiant statement he closes. But Pope Julius, who witnesses this scene, addresses a mild speech to the indignant artist. The problem, he says, is the same as the problem of evil in the world. As God endures the Devil and his hosts, so the artist can endure the envious swarm who attempt in vain to check his triumphant course. He need not return their hate with hate. He conquers them at last by ignoring them.

Hebbel had every reason to take such teaching to heart. If he had imagined immediately after the revolution, that he would acquire influence in the world of letters, and thus indirectly in national life, he now saw himself bitterly disappointed. At one time he dreamed of being Holbein's adviser at the Burgtheater, practically on his own condition. Engländer had publicly suggested the advisability of that as the best means of restoring the prestige of the Burg. And in accepting the editorship of the *Literary Review of the Austrian Imperial News*, he perhaps had hopes of giving a new impulse and direction to literary criticism in Germany. But his impartiality had only made him more feared and hated. Matters even came to the point that a demonstration was made against him in the theater. Friction with his co-editor, and general dissatisfaction with the political policy of the paper, came as an additional reason why he tired of the undertaking and gave it up at the end of a few months (March, 1850).

He had been also much disappointed by the reactionary policy of the new Emperor, Francis Joseph, who had come to power in December, 1848, at the age of eighteen years.

"Concerning conditions here I will say nothing," he wrote to Bamberg in February, 1850. "Thanks to the insane radicals we have been thrown back pretty far. Yet one should not be unjust. Every newspaper proves that there is a world of difference between the Austria of to-day and that before March. And everybody who does not confound top with bottom, will shudder at such a state of affairs as that desired by Messrs. Tausenau, Engländer and others. Personally I suffer most from the change, for my dramatic activity is paralyzed again for a long time to come. But I shall certainly not change my view of the world because I am treated with injustice and ingratitude. I received the same treatment too from the radicals in 1848, and this will happen to any one who has a sense for history and does not live by the newspaper." The Engländer referred to in this letter was the same young author who had welcomed Hebbel to Vienna with such enthusiasm. His ultra-radical activities in 1848 compromised the poet, and brought about a temporary estrangement between the two. By the end of the year (1850) the theaters seemed, as Hebbel says, "for general reasons to be falling back completely into their old dependence on the police system." To help the drama in these evil days, he had planned to edit, in conjunction with Rötcher, a yearbook for dramatic art and literature. But this, like his other editorial plans, came to nothing.

Whether or not it would have been possible under any circumstances for Hebbel, with the austere tone and the inflexible logic of his art, to find an immediate sphere of activity, may well be doubted. But he was far from being favored in this respect. His relations with the one institute that could have aided him most, the Burgtheater, were anything but fortunate. And whatever chances he may have had at one time to form more profitable connections with this leading German stage, were reduced to nothing when Heinrich Laube came into the management, with the beginning of the year 1850. This was the same "arrogant Laube" to whom Hebbel had referred with such contempt during his darkest days in Munich. At that time Laube was one of the leaders of a revolutionary movement in literature, and his works had

once been entirely prohibited by the Frankfurt Parliament. Unlike Heine, however, who suffered exile to preserve his independence, Laube gradually ripened into a conservative. How safe he was felt to be fifteen years later, is shown clearly enough in his appointment to the management of the Burgtheater under a reactionary government.

Hebbel had met Laube two years before in Leipzig, and from that occasion he received the impression that Laube was "true and honorable—what more can one ask?" The new regime, however, at once began unfavorably for Hebbel. A version of *Julius Cæsar* that he had arranged for the stage at the solicitation of Holbein, and that had been accepted, was now returned to him as unsuitable. Laube had a *Julius Cæsar* of his own arrangement. By February Hebbel was complaining to Bamberg that his dramas had disappeared from the stage in Vienna. That he was just to Laube, or even conciliatory as far as lay in his power, appears from a letter to Kühne, in which he speaks of having defended the new director against prejudice and hate. Then *Judith* was given and *Mary Magdalene* was being prepared, so that he grew more optimistic for awhile. This, however, was the only optimistic note and by April he writes: "My good genius did not come to Vienna with Mr. Heinrich Laube. Whether it was my evil genius or not will soon appear." A year later we find another frank effort on his part to make terms with Laube, seemingly in vain. To use the same words he used back in Hamburg with reference to Gutzkow, there was no heart in their relation. And so, in the next ten years, Hebbel's opinion, soon expressed, that Vienna was a house of mediocrity presided over by Heinrich Laube, grew to be his settled conviction.

It is interesting to compare Laube's formulation of his own ideals and attainments with Hebbel's criticism. In his instructive book, *The Burgtheater*, Laube outlines his repertoire as one that "every educated man could call complete." It was to contain all good German plays from Lessing on, that is, the German classical stage. Then Shakespeare, as far as his works could be adapted to modern requirements, and Laube had his very definite notions on

that point. Also French works like *Phèdre*, Spanish dramas like *Donna Diana* and *Life is a Dream*, the last two having been won for the repertoire in the good days of Schreyvogel. And finally, contemporary plays, both German and in translation, as far as these latter might not conflict too much with German custom. As a matter of fact the French salon play became his chief support. Though hesitating to declare that he had attained his ideal, he thought he had come pretty close to it. He claimed to have elevated the Burgtheater, between the years 1850-1867, to the first position in Europe, not excepting the *Théâtre-Français*.

Now let us see what Hebbel said about these attainments. He wrote down his opinion in a sort of review of Vienna theaters (1862), which, however, was not published. As usual he prefaces his remarks with a brief historical sketch. Since Schreyvogel's dismissal, he says, the course of events had led downward. But that director's example in maintaining a good *ensemble* had been followed with profit. The repertoire, of course, had been kept as conservative as possible. The revolution had forced Holbein to change this policy. Laube then came in with the reaction. Hebbel outlines his activity as director. Four chief results stand out in this outline. Laube's first and only principle was the presentation of his own plays, the *ensemble* was ruined by the frequency of visiting actors, all poetry was suppressed, the plays of the Birch-Pfeiffer type being advanced, as well as translations from the French, "like Jonah's gourd, springing up and passing away over night." Finally, the theater was made dependent on daily receipts because of the overloading of the expense account for new actors and experiments.

This indictment, of course, is that of an enemy, and it is severe, but in many ways it is correct. Laube was a man of unbounded energy and keen understanding, quick to see his advantage and not hesitating to avail himself of it. He was essentially without imagination. This corresponded with his appearance, which was "embodied prose." His own dramas are prosaic through and through.

He was inclined to judge everything, even Shakespeare by its adaptability to the stage conventions of his own time. What was clear, reasonable, and well made, won his sympathy, while he distrusted what was profound and poetic. He introduced at the Burgtheater, however, *Faust I*, *The Robbers*, *Fiesco*, *Julius Cæsar* and other works of Shakespeare. He is generally given credit for having discovered a large number of young actors that later became famous, and Georg Altman represents him as the first modern *régisseur*, because he subordinated every element to the creation of the given play as a distinct work of art. In carrying out his idea, he emphasized chiefly the spoken word, using a minimum of decoration and requisites. His favorite notion was to reduce every work to what he considered its shortest form of expression. With this guiding principle he cut and reduced Shakespeare pretty much to suit himself, whether language, scenes, or motives. In the first five years he kept up a sort of Shakespeare cult, which then gave way to contemporary drama. About 1863 he made another feeble effort to reinstate Shakespeare. His own adaptation of *Julius Cæsar* was very successful, while his other adaptations were not well received.

The darkest page in his history as a director, according to Freiherr von Berger,¹ is his treatment of Hebbel. He declared that Hebbel's dramas were unsuited to the stage, and their partial success when given he often attributed to the changes he suggested. In his *Burgtheater* he asserts over and over again, with every appearance of sincerity, that Hebbel's works lack two necessary qualities: reconciliation as tragedies, and stagecraft as plays. Hebbel, he thought, was a "poetizing thinker, not a thinking poet." Like many directors, he did about as he pleased, and with such excellent reasons he could easily justify the most arbitrary actions. If, as Hebbel claimed, he was moved by jealousy, he had the fairest mantle under which to cloak his sin. Laube was by no means alone in his judgment of these questions. In fact he had the majority on his side. How-

¹ Op. cit. Chapter on Laube.

ever he may really have felt about the matter, he threw down the gauntlet to Hebbel's chances for enduring fame as a dramatist, and the success of his challenge grows more and more doubtful with the passing of time. Since his connection with the Burgtheater outlasted Hebbel's life by four years, his hostile attitude had most to do with excluding the poet from his natural sphere of activity. As late as 1860 Hebbel wrote bitterly: "Germany waits for Vienna, and Vienna waits for Laube."

This brief sketch will suffice to show us the general background of Hebbel's further career as far as his chances in Vienna were concerned. It has, however, taken us far beyond the year when the new management began (1850). That year presented Hebbel to the public in a very unfavorable light. *Herod and Mariamne*, with which it began, had failed on the stage, and was generally misunderstood when published. About the same time Hebbel published *The Tragedy in Sicily*, *The Ruby*, *Julia*, and a fragment of a work entitled *The Actress*. This fragment also showed him to great disadvantage. It may be taken as a remnant from the period of social drama, which had ended so much worse than it began. This new work was based on the idea that a woman who has given her soul to an unworthy man may feel herself as deeply degraded as one who has given her body. Both language and characterization of this fragment are stilted and tortuous in the extreme.

Contemporary criticism was not slow to hold up Hebbel's deficiencies. The year 1851 was one of his worst in this respect. It began with a sharp criticism from Hermann Hettner, who found it necessary, as he said, to reject the pretensions Hebbel had made to founding a new *genre* in his *Tragedy in Sicily*. He deplored the fact that this work had been published twice by its author, and added that, with the single exception of *Mary Magdalene*, Hebbel had done nothing to justify the hopes aroused by his *Judith*. A similar position was taken in the same paper (*Blätter für literarische Unterhaltung*) by A. Henneberger, in December of that year. Likewise Gustav Kühne, editor of the *Europa*, in Leipzig, wrote a sharp condemnation of the ill-fated

Tragedy in Sicily, and also included *Herod and Mariamne*. (April 12, 1851). Kühne, who corresponded off and on with Hebbel, had already written several articles on him. He recognized in him the chief poetic talent in Germany, but at the same time saw in his productions certain weaknesses and dangers, which, in his opinion, threatened them seriously. These he pointed out with definiteness and independence. He never forgot, however, the proper bounds of criticism, which marked a sharp distinction between him and Julian Schmidt, the well known historian of German literature.

Julian Schmidt began with Hebbel almost as soon as he entered upon his public career as a critic, in 1847. He was connected with the *Grenzboten*, in Leipzig, at first with J. Kuranda as editor, and then with Gustav Freytag. His guiding principle in criticism was what he termed "common sense," and he consciously opposed all metaphysics in criticism. His strength lay in his analysis of the emotions in literary characters and situations.² He wrote wittily and clearly, but he was often contradictory in the extreme. This was evident in his first review of Hebbel, in which he criticised the first three tragedies and the comedy. After admitting Hebbel to be the greatest dramatic poet in Germany since Schiller and Kleist, he proceeded in the special remarks to leave very little good in him. The same thing was done in a second article on the *Ruby* and *The Tragedy in Sicily* (1850). First, Hebbel was individual, independent, eccentric; gifted with unexcelled power of portraying passion, and possessed of a high conception of his art. His characters, however, were mechanical, their passions and actions forced, they were imbued with a cold, repellent stoicism, and they often spoke like madmen. He had already predicted that Hebbel would end in an insane asylum. This prediction was nearly fulfilled when Hebbel read the criticism, so enraged did he become. He answered Schmidt in an article as drastic as its title: *Disposing of an Esthetic Mountebank*. The tone, however, is earnest and full of dignity. Schmidt

² See Allgemeine d. Biographie.

followed this with a sharp rejoinder. It must be said that his reviews, in attempting to prove that Hebbel delighted in repulsive and horrible ideas, greatly overemphasize the comparative importance of certain disagreeable features in the poet's work, and thus give a very unfavorable, and equally untrue, impression of them.

CHAPTER XII

Agnes Bernauer

HEBBEL did not permit these various conflicts to embitter his life. The publishers, he said, were eager for his wares. In the summer of 1850 he had at last, by dint of hard work and good management, discharged his only remaining debt, the money borrowed of Gurlitt in Italy. He was by no means without very respectable support among men whose opinions counted for something, such as Gervinus and Vischer, not to mention Rötcher and Bamberg. Dingelstedt, recently made director of the Court Theater in Munich, entered into communication with him, which resulted in *Judith* being given in that city, and also led to more important things later. Hebbel was happy at home with his wife and little girl; and by now he also found himself the center of a group of friends on whom he could rely with some assurance. The most important of them was Emil Kuh, who later became the poet's Boswell. It was in 1849 that Kuh, then nineteen years of age, became acquainted with Hebbel, whose works he received enthusiastically. He had literary ambitions, which were destined to find partial gratification, at least, in journalistic and critical essays. In him Hebbel found an eager recipient of his ideas, a sharer of that wealth which increases through being shared. Emil Kuh was his disciple in the real sense of the word, and, as he tells us, scarcely a day passed that he did not spend a part of his time in his master's company. Still younger than Kuh, and, like him, of Jewish ancestry, was Julius Glaser, destined as a follower of the law for a brilliant career. Possessed from the first of remarkable diligence and independence, he enjoyed the poet's influence with more reserve. It will be seen that Hebbel attracted and was attracted by young men. He wished to mould them according to his deeper insight, and cherished the hope of founding a new school of criticism with their assistance. Two others be-

longing to this circle, ironically referred to as the "Court of Frederic the Great,"¹ were Karl Werner, later college professor, and the young composer, Debrois van Bruyck, a follower of Schumann. In addition, Hebbel numbered among his particular friends the painter, Karl Rahl; the priest and poet, Wilhelm Gärtner; and Adolph Pichler, who after studying in Vienna became professor of medicine in Innsbruck.

In the summer of 1851 Hebbel went to Berlin with the purpose of arranging for his wife to play certain guest rôles in the Court Theater. Küstner, with whom he had so much unsatisfactory correspondence about his plays, and who had just refused *Michael Angelo* with the coldest formality, was now replaced by Baron von Hülsen, a young man who, on first sight, impressed the poet favorably. Another object, or perhaps the real object, of this visit, was to look over the situation with a view to finding in Berlin what was lacking in Vienna—a suitable field of activity on the stage for his works and his wife's talent. As early as 1846 the poet began to complain that Christine's talent was not sufficiently valued at the Burgtheater. Under Laube this neglect increased to what he termed an attempt at moral murder. By this he meant that her place as a great *tragédienne* was given to others, while she was forced to play comic rôles. We know that Hebbel considered his wife to be one of the greatest actresses of her day. She was fitted for heroic parts, her manner was rhetorical and somewhat monotonous. According to Gutzkow, this, with her failure to participate in the action when not speaking, was her chief fault. She early became stout, and was given the rôles of nurses and confidantes. She played Mariamne and Kriemhild exceptionally well, but her best parts were probably Clara and Judith (*Bühne und Welt*, IX Jahrgang, I Halbjahr, 380 f., an article by A. von Weilen). Laube considered it best for his actors to play in many different parts, and possibly believed that in discovering new fields for Christine he was acting to her advantage.

¹ Werner, p. 337.

While Hebbel succeeded in arranging the parts for Christine, including a performance of *Judith*, his general impressions of the northern capital were unfavorable. Berlin seemed to him too cold and intellectual, and there he became conscious of the love he bore Austria. While in Berlin he visited Rötcher, who had been one of his warmest advocates. But the climax of his visit came when he made the personal acquaintance of Tieck. The aged poet, twisted and tortured by gout, and just recovered from a serious illness, still faced life with an imperturbable courage. He received his young contemporary and constant admirer with great cordiality. "He stretched out to me," says Hebbel, "his withered, trembling hand, and said: It is kind of you to come to see me. When I touched it, I had the feeling that two centuries were greeting each other." Hebbel had always thought highly of Tieck's poetic talent, and while conscious of fundamental differences in matters of literary conviction, he was never tempted to join with those who helped to embitter the aged author's closing days. On the contrary, he put in a generous word for his critical essays, or his imaginative creations of a certain period. Tieck, who valued this attitude, paid Hebbel a high tribute in the following words to Emil Kuh: "I am very fond of him, and am always glad when he comes. I knew Goethe, and since then I have not met many men as great as Hebbel. Of his writings, to be sure, the most are strange to me . . . though in none of them do I fail to recognize the poet's power."² Upon Tieck's death, three years later, Hebbel wrote a discriminating tribute to him, calling to mind especially the great services rendered by him to Shakespeare and Kleist.

Between the end of September and December 17 of this year (1851), Hebbel wrote his next great work, *Agnes Bernauer*. It is in prose. Its theme he characterizes in the following words: "It simply represents the relation of the individual to society, and accordingly illustrates in two characters, one of the highest, the other of the lowest class,

² Kuh, Vol. II, 320.

the fact that the individual, however splendid and great, however noble and fair, must under all circumstances yield to society. For in society and its necessary formal expression, the state, humanity lives as a whole, while in the individual only one single phase of it is unfolded. This is an earnest and bitter teaching, for which I expect no thanks from the empty democracy of our times. But it runs through all history, and whoever cares to study my former dramas in their totality . . . will find it expressed in them too, clearly enough, as far as the circumstances permitted."

But in none of these works does the poet present this tragic aspect of human life in so typical a manner as in *Agnes Bernauer*. He represents a heroine, who by virtue of her very physical perfection is a menace to the state, and who therefore must perish. She seems to him like a modern Antigone, and in this comparison he recalls that play of antiquity which he took to be a complete example of his tragic theory, in one of its fundamental conditions. Hebbel had already thought of perfect beauty and its results as a fitting tragic theme. In *Genoveva* that conception is expressed with some emphasis. But in the Bavarian traditions about Agnes Bernauer, the so-called Angel of Augsburg, he found the exact material he needed for his purpose.

Hebbel follows the traditional material closely, with one important exception which will be pointed out in the course of our discussion. The chief persons in the drama besides Agnes are Duke Ernst and his son, Albrecht. Not appearing in the play, but hovering in the background and complicating the political situation, are the rulers of the other ducal houses: Ludwig of Ingolstadt and Heinrich of Landshut. These, with Duke Ernst of Munich, rule respectively over the three parts of Bavaria. Ernst has spent the best years of his life in endeavoring to build up his duchy, and in some measure, at least, repair the damage done by his predecessors. Elizabeth of Württemberg, who is engaged to marry Albrecht, having run off with another, he is preparing to demand a large indemnity from her father, and at the same time find a more advantageous match for his

son in Anna of Brunswick. While he is making these excellent arrangements, Albrecht, on a visit to Augsburg, sees Agnes Bernauer, a barber's daughter, and is so captivated by her that he sues for her hand. His love is returned and he is secretly married to her. He then takes her to live with him at his castle, Vohburg. Duke Ernst refuses to credit this news at first, and when finally convinced of its truth he disinherits Albrecht, to declare the sickly boy of his brother, William, as his successor. He is forced to do this, because he believes that, even if he should recognize the marriage, a child of Albrecht and Agnes would never be tolerated as rightful ruler by the jealous lines of Ingolstadt and Lands-hut who would seize this pretext for a civil war. But his extreme measure is of no avail, for the young boy soon dies. Ernst now faces the question as to succession again. Should he select either of the rival lines to succeed him, the other would begin a struggle. If he should die without any heir the same thing would result. He therefore resolves that Agnes Bernauer must be sacrificed to save the country from civil war. Taking advantage of Albrecht's absence from Vohburg, he sends a troop of men under the command of his chancellor to seize Agnes and execute upon her the sentence of death. She is offered life, however, if she will consent to be separated from Albrecht. She refuses and is killed.

According to the tradition Albrecht at first flares up in rage and goes over to his father's rivals but he is soon reconciled. Hebbel brings about the reconciliation in a different way. Albrecht raises an army and fights against his father, whom he takes prisoner. Duke Ernst answers his reproaches by giving over the scepter into his hand and signifying his willingness to be judged by his son and successor. Albrecht realizes for the first time the responsibilities of a ruler and begins to comprehend the reasons for his father's conduct. His wife, accorded in her death the recognition she was refused in her life, is buried with all the ceremony of state. The original feature in Hebbel's interpretation of the material is, therefore, his characterization of Ernst or, what is the same thing, the portrayal of

Agnes's death as a necessary sacrifice. As was natural popular tradition had laid the chief stress upon the unfortunate fate of Agnes, who seemed the victim of cruel tyranny. Hebbel, on the other hand, makes Ernst the hero of the drama and the model of a self-sacrificing ruler. He takes especial care to show the Duke's will in its representative capacity. Behind him stand the empire with its ban, the church with its excommunication, the people with their dependence on him for the preservation of their lives and property. And without faltering he fulfills the tragic duty imposed on him by his position, though his assumption of a harsh exterior cannot for a moment blind us to the bitter woe he is suffering. His dogged and stoical envisaging of his tragic fate is among the strongest points of the drama. Equally fine is the contrast between him and Albrecht—the impetuous youth, so sure of his feelings, so care-free in his defiance of custom, and then suddenly brought close up to the terrible face of reality. His illusions in respect to the authority of individual emotion and will vanish in the stern presence of social exigencies, and he sees himself, the future ruler, as helpless as the lowest servant. He learns his lesson, but his personal happiness is crushed forever.

The clearness with which Hebbel conceived the central idea of his drama is equaled at every point by the vigor and human interest of the characters that embody that idea. Nowhere do the persons live more individually in our minds, do the scenes follow in a more impressive order, does the fate of an individual enlist our sympathies more than in *Agnes Bernauer*. The action is tense and concentrated but every character that enters is vividly portrayed: the plain, blunt Caspar Bernauer, the youthful Theobald, who breathes only in his love for Agnes; the awkward representatives of the artisan guilds in Augsburg, so insistent upon their rights; the officious mayor; the foolish old Knippeldollinger, who hopes his wealth can purchase Agnes's hand; Barbara, her girl friend, tormented by jealousy; on up through the nobler circles, until we reach the impetuous and generous Albrecht and his indomitable, self-sacrificing

father. The dangers of attempting to portray perfection in his heroine the poet has avoided with entire success. She is as human as she is beautiful. She is modest without affectation and her thoughts and feelings correspond to the nobility of her appearance. The qualities of her mind are evident in her words and actions, her beauty in its impression upon those around her. It is a fatal gift, which renders her against her will the center of continual strife. It incites the young, it makes the old foolish, it arouses envy and jealousy among her friends, it surrounds her every step in public with difficulties, and finally threatens to disrupt the social order. Her bearing under these conditions is what we would like. She receives Albrecht into her affections without excluding her father from them, and while not sacrificing the simplicity of her class she gradually fits into her position as Albrecht's wife. The heroic dignity, touched by the inevitable human shudder, with which she goes to meet her end reminds us indeed of the moving lament of Antigone taking leave of her native city.

Hebbel thought his *Agnes Bernauer* would make him popular at last. Among all his dramas up to that time he regarded it as the clearest in idea and the most concrete in all its parts. A good many persons agreed with him, as for example Robert Prutz, who considered this work a turning point in the poet's career. In general, however, like the rest of his works it was doomed to be an "apple of discord." As fortune would have it *Agnes Bernauer*, founded on Bavarian tradition, was given for the first time in Munich, and that under circumstances of peculiar interest. Dingelstedt, since 1850 director of the Court Theater there, had been in correspondence with Hebbel regarding the new drama. He had already given *Judith* with success, and now he resolved to give the new work under the personal supervision of its author. Hebbel arrived in Munich on February 21, 1852. For the first time he re-entered the city where years before in the midst of bitter poverty he had completed the foundations of his spiritual life. His letters tell with what emotions he visited familiar scenes. But under what different circumstances! The poor student had

looked on the outside of the theaters where now his works formed an absorbing topic. In aristocratic circles he was an honored guest and he was admitted to audiences with two kings and a queen, with whom he discussed poetry and the drama. He even took tea with them! To his wife he wrote: Have Kuh put all this in the papers for the sake of the rabble! These favors from above were quickly reflected from below, and upon presentation of *Judith* the poet was summoned on the stage by a storm of applause.

After careful preparation by Dingelstedt and himself, after much enthusiastic labor, *Agnes Bernauer* was given on March 25, 1852. Exactly what happened soon became a matter of violent dispute in the literary journals, the poet's friends announcing a triumph, his enemies heralding a failure. Hebbel's own account in a letter to Christine spoke of a decisive victory, especially noting the fact that he was called on the stage three times—and this in spite of the inferior acting in all except two rôles, neither of which was a leading one. He admitted, however, that the discussion of the problem between father and son at the end had cooled the audience decidedly, and he determined to change that a little in the direction of dramatic effectiveness. This same opinion was expressed by the influential *Augsburg General News* (*Allgemeine Zeitung*), which in other respects praised the author with unaccustomed warmth. Decidedly the most interesting account of the whole performance is given by Dingelstedt in his sketch of Hebbel.³ According to him the first two acts met with enthusiastic reception, the third act—the open quarrel between father and son, the conflict between peasants and knights—created a sensation, due to its apparent bearing on contemporary conditions in Bavaria, while the last two acts, following this excitement, produced almost no effect whatever. Thus what was farthest from Hebbel's mind, an entirely accidental feature of his work, and a consideration not connected with it as a piece of dramatic art, had most to do with its first reception. Hebbel had considered a transfer from Vienna to Munich.

³ In his *Literarisches Bilderbuch*.

But even before the *Agnes Bernauer* performance he seems to have given up this idea because of the factions he had immediately discovered in that city. The "Old Bavarians" were jealous of the number of North-German celebrities that surrounded the court. To Hebbel it seemed that Dingelstedt's own position was none too secure, a view later justified by the event. Besides, Vienna paid much better for Christine's acting. The doubts he had, in spite of indications from all sides that he would be welcome in Munich, were fully confirmed when he heard that *Agnes Bernauer* would not be repeated. It was said that one of the principal actors was sick. When Hebbel heard this, says Dingelstedt, "he smiled and began to pack his trunk."

It now remains to connect *Agnes Bernauer* briefly with the effect produced on Hebbel by the revolution of 1848. This may be done largely in his own words. In a letter to Gervinus he declared that it was a direct result of the revolution. And in a second letter, replying to certain objections, he says: "To be sure, the insane desire to emancipate the individual, which is manifested in our time by conservatives and democrats alike, may have led me to emphasize the law too sharply and I hope to find some subdued tones yet." On all hands he had to defend the sacrifice of Agnes to the state. Writing to Pichler he speaks of an aristocratic lady who was content with everything in the drama except that, or rather Albrecht's reconciliation to it. "This," says the poet, "is repeated on all sides, by all parties and factions, and furnishes such convincing proof to what extent the individual of our time has lost sight of the general forces, of which Duke Ernst is beyond all doubt a thoroughly legitimate representative. I consider this, for higher than esthetic reasons, to be a sad indication, for from it follows that we can produce neither consistent tyrants nor consistent republicans." The same position is taken even more emphatically in a letter to Uechtritz (1854), where the poet declares that he is entirely on the side of Duke Ernst, who alone had kindled his imagination for the work. From all these statements, and from what we know of Hebbel's views in similar instances, it is plain that *Agnes Bernauer*

is an extreme expression—that it is extreme he himself admits—of his settled conviction as to the duty and the fate of the individual in conflict with general forces. All around him he saw people clamoring for freedom from the past, for a new order of society in which “individuality” should find complete expression. While his attitude in 1848 shows clearly enough that he did not believe in social ossification, he saw no hope in the future apart from the full recognition by the individual of his proper place in a larger organization. His eyes were not for a moment blinded by the “individuality” heralded so loudly on all sides. While the storm was in full sway, Hebbel was repeating in a letter of reconciliation to Amalia Schoppe the memorable words which come nearest expressing his final conclusion on the question of individuality. “When man comprehends in its necessary aspects his individual relation to the Universe, he has completed his education, and has, in the proper sense of the word, ceased to be an individual. For the comprehension of this necessity, the ability to attain it and the power to hold it—that is just what is universal in the individual, extinguishing all unjustifiable egotism and freeing the spirit from death by essentially anticipating it.”

From a man holding this stern view of life it is evident in what spirit we have to receive such a drama as *Agnes Bernauer*. It is his protest against the indiscriminate riot of the spirit everywhere being proclaimed as freedom, a discussion of the basic principles underlying the whole relation of individual and society. The position he took was in line with the trend of thought in Germany throughout the first part of the nineteenth century. He did not conceive of the state as having originated in a social contract, but in a gradual and organic concentration of powers possessed by its individuals. The eighteenth century had come to look on the state as a mere collection of individuals and reduced it in theory to a negative function. The individual was to be absolute and supreme. Gradually, even for the men who had held this view, the Romanticists, Fichte, Humboldt, and others, the state assumed a more organic function, that of making it possible for the individual to develop. Then it

took on a metaphysical significance as representing the Idea in human society, and became an end in itself above all individuals. This view was most thoroughly embodied in the philosophy of Hegel, whose system may be regarded as a synthesis of the most vital thought concerning the state during his time. This was what Treitschke described as a reawakening of antique morality. That Hebbel was in sympathy with this general view needs no repetition. Yet side by side with that he never wearies of stressing the importance of the individual. Through the individual alone all great advances are made, in him alone nature draws the interest on her invested capital. The only solution of this apparent contradiction seems to be contained in the words written to Amalia Schoppe, as above quoted. And they say the same thing as the verse that ran: "The way to thee leads through the Universe."

The autumn of that year (1852) brought Hebbel the distinction of a long article on himself and his works in the *Revue de deux Mondes* by Saint René Taillandier. The reviewer had received for his purpose a detailed account directly from the poet. It is interesting to see that Taillandier connected *Mary Magdalene* with the plays of Dumas. But of this drama he had little conception and was evidently afraid of it because of its theme. *Agnes Bernauer* fared best at his hands, with its conflict, as he put it, between love and duty, and he particularly valued the character of Ernst and the tragic fate of Agnes. Hebbel, he declared, lacked neither force, nor wealth, nor boldness, but serenity. What he needed was more experience of life and less concern with systematic theory. Taillandier was absolutely opposed to the metaphysical type of criticism rife in Germany and deplored all the prefaces to Hebbel's dramas. He expressed the hope that Vienna would cause Hebbel to strive for greater clearness, and closed with the plea that he give up trying to be the "dramatist of a century" and the "mystagogue of humanity." "Let him be the dramatist of Germany and he will give Europe a poet!" All this must have sounded familiar enough to Hebbel.

During the winter (1852-53) Hebbel was, contrary to

his habit, not in a productive mood. He completed the task of editing the works of Feuchtersleben, which he had undertaken at the solicitation of the widow. This had been begun several years before, and as Hebbel carried it out with his usual exactness it robbed him of much valuable time. The sketch of Feuchtersleben accompanying the edition is a good example of Hebbel's method of criticism, and the ease and authority with which he analyses poetic effort are remarkable. We cannot, however, dwell on that here. In commenting upon Feuchtersleben's aversion to contemporary German literature, Hebbel gives a concise summary of that movement and its results. While in view of his own life's work he could not share the idea of Vischer and Gerwinus, that contemporary conditions made the existence of representative poetry impossible, Hebbel never concealed from himself the special difficulties placed by his times in the way of harmonious development. He realized that it was a transition period, the birth of a new humanity. The revolutionary violence with which this change occurred interfered with the esthetic valuation of the drama. His *Agnes Bernauer* had given him a particular instance of this state of affairs. In spite of adverse conditions, however, Hebbel discovered a respectable number of works sufficiently representative of the period to promise lasting fame to their authors. It was in this connection that he spoke in favorable terms of Gutzkow's novel, *Ritter vom Geist*. From this resulted another effort on the part of the two men to make friends with each other, beginning in Leipzig in the summer of 1853.

In the following January the Burgtheater produced, for the first time in three years, a new play of Hebbel. This was not *Agnes Bernauer*, which had been changed considerably at Laube's instance and yet finally refused, but *Genoveva*. Hebbel had sent this work to Laube several years earlier and at last its performance was arranged for. From title down the drama had to be changed almost beyond recognition in order to satisfy the censors. *Genoveva* became *Magelone*, *Golo* became *Bruno*, etc. After a half dozen performances this work vanished from the Burg.

Judith was the only play of Hebbel that continued to be seen in Vienna—about once a year.

In the summer of 1854, Hebbel went to Marienbad for the sake of his wife's health. It was their habit to spend a part of the summer each year out of the city, and Hebbel generally indulged at least once a year his fondness for traveling. In addition to meeting Metternich in Marienbad he became well acquainted with Friedrich von Uechtritz, with whom he later exchanged important letters. On November 18 of that year Elise Lensing died in Hamburg. Hebbel's note of this fact in his *Diary*, on the last day of the year, reveals the depth of emotion it awakened in him.

In the same place he recorded the completion of a new drama, *Gyges and His Ring*.

CHAPTER XIII

Gyges, A VOLUME OF STORIES, Mother and Child

GYGES and *His Ring* is by many considered to be Hebbel's finest work. In some respects this is no doubt true. Certainly from the standpoint of language it is unsurpassed. Hebbel's sense of beauty, always strong but not always harmonized with his striving for energetic characterization, has here attained full development. There are difficulties, however, in the motivation in this drama, difficulties innate in the material, and while the poet has perhaps done what was possible with them his solution cannot satisfy all readers of his work. The subject is taken from Herodotus, who relates that Candaules, King of Lydia, permitted his friend Gyges to see the unequalled beauty of his wife. Embittered by this outrage the queen urged Gyges to kill her husband, promising to reward him with her hand and the throne. He accomplished this deed and after putting down a rebellion among the people became king and the founder of a new dynasty.

While recognizing the dramatic possibilities of this story, Hebbel also saw that certain assumptions in it would be hard for modern times to accept. The reader, he said, would have to transfer himself to a remote period when women, like the Helen of Homer, were possessions to be fought for rather than persons of free will. The problem of this drama is therefore akin to that in *Herod and Mariamne*. We have a woman of surpassing beauty, a husband who commits a grievous wrong against her, and a friend whom he uses for that purpose. In the same act he dishonors both his wife and his friend. In each case the husband fails to comprehend his wife as truly as his friend does. But *Gyges and His Ring* is an original variation of this theme and it is freer and more poetic in its treatment than the earlier drama. Hebbel gave his new heroine the name of Rhodope. He said that his chief difficulty lay in making her convincing. Per-

haps she is more convincing than certain phases, at least, of the other characters, but we shall point out the peculiarity of her motives. Rhodope is not a Lydian by birth. She is from a land where women are held in strictest seclusion, spending their days in dreams and considering themselves polluted should the eye of man rest upon them. With the exception of her father and her husband no man has ever seen her face. From her childhood this custom, supported by all the fervor of her religious faith, has been ingrained and inwoven into her feelings. Her veil is a part of her very being, the symbol of her modesty, and we cannot imagine her apart from it. Her soul is like the white leaf of the lily, which can be blighted by a mere touch. Her love is indeed a priceless possession but it imposes the strictest obligations on its recipient. Nature and training subject her to peculiar emotions, which run their own secret course in her heart and make of it a sweet mystery. To know this mystery and yet respect it is the task that Candaules should have taken upon himself.

We therefore understand what Hebbel meant by saying that the character of Candaules was the central point of the tragedy. Rhodope's fate is absolutely in his hands. Not only upon his will, even more upon his character does her happiness depend. Candaules is unfortunately not the man to handle the tender fabric of her dreams. Though in many respects a noble character he lacks one most important quality: reverence. Among his people he is a quasi-reformer, a despiser of tradition in every form. Ahead of his times, he makes fun of his times. He has brought his Lydians to the verge of revolt by his contempt for the "rubbish of the past," the stuffed dragon-hides, the booty of his great ancestor, Herakles, the huge crown and the giant sword. He does not see why he should not have a new crown and new sword. In the same spirit he misunderstands the meaning of his wife's veil. He is continually twitching at it. He would persuade her against her will to attend the public games, where all men might behold her beauty and know what unique charms he calls his own. We thus see that Rhodope has been committed into dangerous keeping.

The latent dangers in this situation are called forth by the entrance of Gyges upon the scene. The gifted Grecian, skilled to play upon the lyre, he is also athlete enough to win all the prizes from the rude Lydians at their own games. They hold him in high esteem and many of them would be glad to have him rule over them instead of the peace-loving reformer, Candaules. This does not tempt Gyges, however, for he and the King, whose relation to each other is one of the finest things in the tragedy, are inseparable friends. Candaules is forever praising the beauty of his wife to his companion. To all this Gyges listens half indifferently. He knows nothing about women and what natural curiosity he possesses finds more gratification in the visible beauty of Rhodope's attendant, Lesbia, when her veil is lifted by the wind. Candaules, however,

—was like a priest in whom a flame
Irradiant burns, and who, his god to honor,
Would kindle it within another's bosom,
And when o'ermastered, passionately heedless
He bares of veil the Holy Mysteries.¹

A magic ring that Gyges had found in a ruined tomb and given to Candaules is to be the means they use. When the stone is turned inward the wearer of the ring becomes invisible. Warned by an inner voice Gyges hesitates, but finally he yields to his friend's importunities. An inexperienced youth he does not yet realize the enormity of what he is doing. But the sight of Rhodope's beauty completely changes him. He had never before come under the spell of a woman and now he is intoxicated as if with some fatal wine. With his awakened love comes the sense of horror at the outrage he has done the beloved object. Candaules at first sees in this altered mood of his friend merely the most convincing proof of his triumph, but he is quickly made to feel that he has done both his wife and his friend a fatal wrong. Gyges surprises him by offering his life as an atonement for his deed, and this being refused, prepares to take his leave

¹ The quotations are from *Herod and Other Plays* by Frederic Hebel, translated by L. H. Allen. Everyman, p. 50.

forever. His words and manner convince Candaules that he loves Rhodope and therefore he consents for him to go.

But Rhodope's suspicions must also be allayed. Her quick intuition has given her warning. She had heard certain sounds and she imagined that she had caught the flashing outlines of a figure—and indeed Gyges in his confusion had turned the ring on his finger for a second. Thus Rhodope believes that an irreparable wrong has been done her, though of course it is farthest from her thought to connect her husband with it.

My soul, 'tis true!
Vain, vain the salve of flattering persuasion
That I have duped my senses. Turn thee, Night,
And pall me in the dunnest of thy veils!
I am defiled as never yet was woman.

In a masterful scene between these two Candaules all but persuades her that her senses deceived her. For one moment we feel that the danger is past and breathe a sigh of relief with the King, who at last sees the deep injury he has done his wife. But his very eagerness to atone ruins everything. He mentions the fact that Gyges, whose companionship he fears may have deprived her of too much of his time, is on the point of leaving. This name is the lost link in Rhodope's memory and she knows that it was Gyges' figure that flashed across her vision. Knowing of the magic ring she now thinks she comprehends what has happened. She infers that her husband, aware of his friend's guilt, is sending him away unpunished. This is for her an even more terrible thought. Thus the poet gradually builds up to the real climax of her discovery. Gyges shall not escape her vengeance. The faithful servants whom her father had sent with her bring him into her presence. Confessing his wrong at once he offers his life in willing atonement. Rhodope, though pitying her victim, accepts this sacrifice according to the custom of her country.

Gyges: In sooth I knew it not, ay, can swear it.
Women to me are strange; but as the boy

Thrusts at some wondrous bird a clutching hand
Rough with its crush, because its tender nature
He knows not, though his will was to caress,
E'en so I brought the jewel of this world
To ruin, all unwitting what I did.

Rhod.: His word is noble. Woe to him and me
That it is vain!

Gyges: When the Castalian fount,
Which god-delighting men have for their drinking,
And which from shuttling colours takes a glance
As though culled blossoms from a rain-bow garden
By Iris' very hands thereon were strown,
When in this fount, that from Parnassus springs,
A troubling stone is flung, it falls to boiling
And starts in wheeling turmoil hilly-high.
Then sings no more on earth the nightingale
Nor evermore the lark, and in the heights
A dumbness holds the Muses' holy choir,
And never knows the harmony returning
Till a grim stream wraps the foolhardy flinger
Gnashing him down into its lightless depths.
Thus it is also with a woman's soul!

Candaules, who is a witness to this confession, cannot, of course, thus betray his friend.

Kan.: Gyges, I am no villain!

Gyges: Lord, you are
Rhodope's husband, shield and shelter both,
And must be her avenger.

Kan.: I'm Man, and for the sacrilege myself
Committed, suffer no man else to die.

Gyges: King, what is saved by this?

Kan.: Myself.

Gyges: He raves;
Give him no hearkening ear.

Rhod.: My Lord and Consort,
What word was that? I scarce believe myself
If you repeat it not.

The climax is reached in this dramatic scene. Rhodope,

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though fully resolved to die, must first remove the stain from her life. With the threat of perishing by her own hand if he refuse, she compels Gyges to slay her husband in combat. She then gives him her hand at the altar as she had promised.

Rhod.: And now step back. Be faithful to your vow
As I keep faith with mine. My stain is purged,
For none has seen me save for whom 'twas meet.
But now I disunite me (*stabs herself*) thus from you!

I have given the chain of motivation as favorably as I could in brief compass. It will scarcely be necessary to point out the weaker links. The poet in his complete work is his own best advocate. Particularly fine in the tragedy is the relation between the King and Gyges, with its unswerving loyalty to the end. Caught in the inexorable tragedy of their own making, they carry through their part like true and heroic men.

Kan.: Then give
Your hand for this once more.—Now be for me
A tiger. I for you a lion, and this
The wildwood where we oft have led the chase.

Hebbel said that he never became conscious of the more universal aspects of this tragedy until the end. In his parting advice to Gyges, Candaules gives him the result of his life's experience, bought at the price of life itself. One should not always ask what a thing is but what it stands for. It may stand for something out of all proportion to its inherent value. If the King had recognized this truth in the beginning he would not so lightly have interfered with the feelings of his people and his wife. He does not respect the proper limits of his power. Hebbel makes use of the ring as a symbolic element only. He never wrote more beautiful passages than those in which its subtle influence is described. His language, usually hard and glittering like the diamond, here takes on the warm color of the ruby. It is plain that the ring merely gives the character an opportunity to reveal itself. Both Rhodope and Gyges would put it aside as a temptation too great for human beings to withstand.

Only Candaules has no fear. With a few well chosen strokes the poet characterizes Gyges in sharp contrast to the King, both in relation to the Lydians and in a subtle sympathy between his nature and that of the Queen. For he refuses to set the crown upon his head until the people have chosen him, and the Queen says to him:

You never had allured me from my home
To wrong me thus.

Thus in one character he shows the false relation to tradition, in the other the true relation.

The new tragedy sold well, though the theaters seemed afraid of it. It was first presented in Vienna in 1889. The critics condemned it as a whole, but praised the language. Hebbel took little notice of these criticisms.

In 1855 Hebbel at last managed to publish a volume of his stories, a thing he had considered often enough. Each of the seven stories in this collection had been published in separate form already. Most of them had been written at a much earlier date. Three of them, *Matteo*, *Anna* and *The Cow*, are dramatic in the extreme, very much in the style of Kleist. *Anna* has already been characterized. *Matteo*, written in Hamburg during the composition of *Genoveva*, reflects that pessimistic period of its author's life. It is the study of an attractive and promising young fellow whose entire position is changed when an attack of smallpox completely disfigures him. Because of his horrible appearance he is generally taken to be a villain. Circumstances at last induce him to become what he seems. How his ugliness chances to turn into his good fortune, however, is shown in a tragic episode that threatens to overshadow our interest in the hero.

The Cow, Hebbel's last story (1849), was considered by him and his friends to be his best, and generally to take high rank. The material, taken from a newspaper, is striking enough. A peasant having saved enough money to buy a cow counts his banknotes by candle-light, while his three-year old boy is playing around the table. He goes out to see whether the cow is coming and the child burns up one

banknote after another, delighted with the flames. The father returns, sees the last one disappearing, and in rage throws the child against the wall, killing it. He then hangs himself in the garret. His wife and the farm-hand return with the cow, find the child's body and begin to search for the peasant. The farm-hand climbs the ladder to the garret, and is so terrified at the sight of his master's body that he falls backward and breaks his neck. From the light he carried in his hand the house takes fire and is destroyed. Hebbel, who follows these outlines closely, gives us a masterpiece of characterization in the peasant, and in general the scene leading up to the death of the child, who is led to burn the notes by seeing his father light a pipe, could not be better. Hebbel knew the peasant, how hard he toils and how he values what he earns. He knew the narrow circle within which that type of human being is included. Hence his Andreas stands before us like a masterpiece of *genre* painting. He fingers his banknotes with affection, counts them at least nine times, knows just when and where each was earned, a torn edge of one, an ink-spot on another. He smokes a pipe only on Sundays, and never, even when wet and cold, spends a penny for drink. All his life he has worked to get two mules and this cow. He must leave it to his son to get a horse. The cow is the center of years of hope and labor. The rest of the story proceeds rapidly, according to the account. Only here the mother sinks in a faint over her child, and is destroyed by the flames. And to complete the ruin to the last tittle the poor cow rushes into the flames and perishes, an addition likely to produce a very different effect from that which Hebbel intended.

Of the remaining stories, two, *Paul's Most Remarkable Night*, and *A Night in the Huntsman's Lodge*, deal with the emotion of fear aroused in predisposed minds by all kinds of mysterious circumstances. That Hebbel possessed the means for this sort of story, has been shown clearly enough in the discussion of his ballads. Here, however, the fear turns out in a more or less humorous fashion to be groundless. The other two stories are character studies, one of an eccentric tailor who sees in every event only personal malice

of fate against himself, the other, which is much more successful, of an irresponsible ne'er-do-well named Haidvogel. This worthy, having spent all his considerable fortune and reduced his wife and two children to bitter need, is, at the opening of the story, engaged in breaking up his last chair to cook his last potatoes. But his optimism is unconquerable. He lives in a world where at any time a golden crown may fall upon the poorest head—at least he thinks he does. His hope is centered on his wife's rich uncle, who is expected to die soon. And he really dies soon, from a fit of apoplexy caused by Haidvogel himself and just before being able to disinherit his niece for marrying such a vagabond. The hero is just planning with his vivid imagination what he will do with the money, when his wife announces her intention of managing their affairs in the future.

In the summer of 1855 Hebbel decided to risk a part of his savings in a modest house and lot in Gmunden on the Traunsee. However great the distance, he said, between Shakespeare and himself, he would sooner have hoped to approach that poet in some scene or character than in the possession of a house. From now on the family spent their summers in this idyllic repose. Hebbel was thoroughly content. The daily round of life with its ordinary blessing seemed to him a continual benediction of Heaven. His happiness was bound up in his wife and little girl, by whom he suffered himself to be adored, we are told, with a kind of patient resignation. The course of his life now furnishes a complete and satisfactory contrast with its early prolonged poverty and bitterness. In surveying the obstacles he overcame and the progress he made, we cannot suppress the feeling that providence is kind to those of a firm will. The poet's only concern for his present condition was that it might not endure. The heights, he said, had been reached—the only future course lay downward.

Though Hebbel was a tragic poet through and through, who saw in comedy itself only a more poignant tragedy, the present harmony of his own existence led him now, for the first time indeed on a larger scale, to portray human life from an idyllic point of view. For this purpose he chose

the form of verse narrative, which had once more become popular in Germany. The result was an epic poem in dactylic hexameters in seven cantos, under the title of *Mother and Child*. As in the case of Hebbel's works generally the idea for this poem was one of long standing in his mind. Completed in 1857 and published two years later, it was honored with the Tiedge prize, which had been offered for an epic in the style of *Hermann and Dorothea*. The story, briefly, is that of a rich merchant and his wife who have remained childless. While he, in turning his wealth to good use for the poor, is reconciled to this fate, his wife, unconsciously from selfish and vain motives, is in danger of embittering both his existence and her own through the extravagance of her discontent. Upon the advice of an old family doctor they offer to set up Christian and Magdalene, two of their servants, on a farm, which shall become their own on condition that their first child be given up secretly and passed off as the merchant's child. The poor couple, whose only hope of union lies in this plan, accept it only to find, especially the mother, that they have not the strength for the sacrifice when it is actually demanded. They take flight with the child but are finally discovered after having experienced extreme want. The merchant gives them the farm, as he had intended anyhow even if they had refused his condition, and his wife realizes the enormity of the demand she had made on a mother and the wretchedness that might have resulted from it. Her selfish motives become clear to her and she learns resignation to the will of Providence.

Though from this outline the poem might seem to be concerned chiefly with the merchant and his wife, such is not at all the case. The title, *Mother and Child*, indicates where the emphasis is laid. The least interesting parts of the narrative have to do with the merchant and his wife, neither of whom enlists our sympathies deeply, except perhaps in the closing canto. Their activities serve mainly as a frame for the real picture. Wherever the life and relations of Christian and Magdalene are touched the poet speaks from his heart. In the former, who bears one of Hebbel's own

names, he set a monument to Wesselburen, to the sturdy character of those peasants whose lives he knew from boyhood, to their strength of body and mind, to their sane judgment and their moral earnestness. A fitting companion he depicts in Magdalene, whose quiet intensity dawns upon us gradually in the course of the poem. We see these two in their first hopes, in their joyous work together, each in the suitable sphere, in their common happiness over their child as it begins to take notice of them—passages of particular beauty, a reflex of the poet's family life—in their first dispute, when Magdalene refuses to give up her boy and Christian insists on keeping his word. Then follows her flight alone with the child. He finds her after anxious hours, and her instinct having shown him the right way they now flee together. Whatever wealth Hebbel had assembled in the way of observation of nature and insight into human relations found natural expression in this material. And that wealth is truly astonishing. It is not surpassed by many poets.

Besides the personal elements of the work we should especially notice the broad background against which it is outlined. The poet here found a place for his convictions on many important questions of the day. In this way he creates the atmosphere of his poem. We see how the Eldorado of California gold mines appeared to the hard pressed German of the mid-century. Christian, as little covetous as he is, is forced by necessity to look in that direction, from which come reports of horrible deeds as well as of marvelous fortunes. The poet also pictures for us the great Hamburg fire, its most terrible sight being the poor driven out of their wretched lodgings like rats from their holes. Over against this and against Christian's want is placed the opulence of the merchant, who, however, realizes that his wealth is a commission in his hands to aid those less fortunate. And we are shown, if not exactly his wife's world, at least that world with which she comes in contact, in which vain women adorn themselves for effect and never give a thought to the wretchedness that surrounds them. The revolution, too, sounds warningly in the person of the

joiner, who has returned from America and now expects to see a paradise of freedom and wealth in Europe. Opposed to this, Christian, even in his gloomiest hour, sternly defends order against chaos. Here again we hear the voice of the poet, who, like his own hero, came from a poverty-stricken home in Wesselburen.

If we compare Hebbel's poem with *Hermann and Dorothea*, we find that the conflicts are sharper and the passions more intense. On the other hand we miss the perfectly even adjustment of all the elements from beginning to end, the unquestioned solution of every difficulty, the sovereign unfolding of each scene and character that so distinguish Goethe's poem from others. These qualities Hebbel attains in the last half of his poem more generally than in the first. While both Christian and Magdalene are introduced in the first canto, our impressions of the latter are not sharply defined there. The second canto is a kind of dramatic monologue taken up almost entirely by the merchant, and, indirectly through him, by his wife. Her characterization is continued in the third canto. Yet neither of these characters is particularly distinct in our minds. Hebbel portrays chiefly by action and conversation. The speeches of the persons themselves, while more realistic in the choice of words, are not as individualizing as in Goethe, nor is he careful to let us see his persons as others see them. In this respect the poem would suffer most perhaps by comparison with *Hermann and Dorothea*. Hebbel makes a moderate use of description, which is exceptionally well done. In none of his works is a quiet objectivity more noticeable. His models were evidently Homer and Goethe. Finally, the whole poem is pervaded by a spirit which is Hebbel's own—a certain moral grandeur, a beneficial decisiveness in human crises, a severe and impartial judgment of right and wrong, the voice of the poet that is at the same time a prophet.

Mother and Child was welcomed by Hebbel's friends, who regarded it as the only genuine epic since *Herman and Dorothea*. Hebbel wrote to Kuno Fischer, requesting him to review the poem if he thought fit, that is, if he considered

its basis sufficiently universal. Hebbel believed that he had taken the broadest possible basis, the relation between mother and child, just as Goethe had presented the relation between lovers. Fischer, however, did not accede to Hebbel's wish because the poem seemed to him too individual and particular in its treatment.

In the same year (1857) Hebbel, though also busy on his most ambitious work, the *Nibelungen*, was able to prepare the final edition of his poems for publication. He dedicated the volume to that poet whom he honored most among the living, Ludwig Uhland. The collection contained new poems and epigrams, while the older were carefully filed and their final arrangement was determined upon. The poems were published by Cotta, whom Hebbel had repeatedly endeavored to interest in his work. They were well received throughout Germany. Hebbel evidently expected at this time to gain more concessions from the *Augsburg General News*, which, being in the hands of his enemies, cut him off from the literary world outside Germany. A friendly correspondence with Cotta, however, showed him that the latter had little to do with the paper, and the half-hearted relation he then established with the editors soon ended. What Hebbel himself thought of his poems can be seen from his letter to Gutzkow, accompanying his "ripest and richest" book. In that same letter he confesses himself to be an adherent of "old Germany." In a much quoted review of Hebbel's poems, Paul Heyse characterized their author as interesting, forceful, and lonely, but too conscious and lacking overflowing joy in his work. In addition to some very justifiable blame for the involved style of many of the sonnets, he condemned poems like *The Child at the Well* and the *Heath Lad*, which are now well established in the literature.

Hebbel's only attempt at an opera text fell in the beginning of the following year (1858). This was named *The Casting of a Stone* and was done for Rubinstein, who paid a good price for it. The comments from both sides, when put together, sound like an extract from *Spoon River Anthology*. Hebbel believed that he had learned a good deal about the

relation between music and poetry, explained how he had been compelled to restrain his own ideas in working by a prescribed plan, and in order not to encroach upon the sphere of the music, and added that this insignificant work had brought him in more than *Judith*, *Genoveva*, *The Diamond*, and the poems, all together. Rubinstein wrote to a friend on the same occasion: "At last I have the opera text from Hebbel. I am unfortunate with opera texts. Here are eight hundred gulden thrown away . . . an immature product, without knowledge of the stage, no characterization, and silly verses."² The work fully upholds Rubinstein's opinion.

By 1858, Hebbel tells us, the last one of his dramas had vanished from the Burgtheater. This was not the case elsewhere. In Dingelstedt, Hebbel possessed a faithful friend. Dingelstedt, who had in the meantime exchanged Munich for Weimar, now arranged for a presentation of *Genoveva* in that town. He was an ardent admirer of this work, and he intended, with the assistance of the author, to give it in as nearly the real form as possible. As an especial honor it was given on the Grand Duke's birthday. The weeks spent by Hebbel during that summer in Weimar were among the happiest of his life. He was received with every mark of cordiality and distinction by the Grand Duke, who also conferred on him the order of his house. He associated intimately with Liszt, while in the young Princess Marie Wittgenstein he met one of the most valued friends of his later years. Unlike his Munich experiences these ended without dissonance of any kind. For the next year (1859) Dingelstedt was planning a great celebration in honor of Schiller's hundredth birthday, and Hebbel was urged to complete his *Demetrius* for that occasion. All Germany, says Hebbel, was expecting him to complete Schiller's unfinished *Demetrius* but he realized that his drama must be a different work.

² Br. III, p. 114

CHAPTER XIV

THE *Nibelungen* AND *Demetrius*

THE *Nibelungen*, together with the unfinished *Demetrius*, was Hebbel's last considerable production. For more than four years (1855 to March 22, 1860) he had been engaged, though with frequent interruptions, upon the *Nibelungen*, the greatest theme since Homer. As the *Iliad* forever preserves for us the truest record of a whole human epoch, so the *Nibelungenlied* shows us, though as through a veil, the Germanic world before it yielded to the pervasive influence of Christianity and a foreign culture. Our Germanic ancestors stand complete before us as only the poetic imagination can portray them—their faults and their noble qualities, their superstitions and their social ideals, their love of life and their contempt of death, the dark forests in which they dwelt, surrounded by savage beasts, their greed for gold and fame, their eagerness for battle, their insatiate thirst for revenge, their honor of bravery and that highest of their ideals, fidelity to an oath.

The German *Nibelungenlied* is the glory of the golden age of middle high German literature. It was no little thing even to approach such a subject. Others, Fouqué, Raupach, Geibel, had attempted it without great success, and Fr. Th. Vischer had pointed out in a critical essay what their failure seemed to confirm, that almost insuperable difficulties must be overcome before the story could form the subject of a modern drama. He believed it was better adapted to a modern opera, thus foretelling the work of Wagner. Hebbel had both carefully considered Vischer's essay and thoroughly criticised the existing dramas, all with reference to the possibilities of his own dramatization. He was therefore familiar with the main aspects of the subject. The difficulties were plain. First of all there were the mythical elements: the supernatural qualities of Siegfried and Brunhild, the crudities of the combat for her possession. How

could such things be made convincing on the stage? The chief difficulty, however, was, as Vischer pointed out, the subjectivity necessary to character in the modern drama. If the poet should give Siegfried, Hagen, and Gunther the inner complexity needed to make them appeal to the modern mind, they would be different persons entirely from what they are in the *Nibelungenlied*. Their very being depended on a naïve inner life, on simple motives followed unhesitatingly by energetic action. Hebbel recognized the truth of this observation and soon determined that no modern attempt could be successful which did not keep close to the grand fundamental lines of the characters in the old story. But he thought that even if this primitive grandeur and strength were preserved, it would still be possible to venture far enough into subjective motives to make a dramatic whole. And just in this respect he exercised continual restraint upon himself and confessed the reluctance with which he cast overboard many a good thought in order to preserve the spiritual inflexibility of his persons. Unless he could succeed with this fresco style, he knew that these old figures would be summoned out of the past only to seem like swaggering and cruel prattlers. He aspired to handle his theme with a sort of Shakespearean grasp.

Over against these and other obstacles in his way, such as the technical problem of showing the grand catastrophe, must be set Hebbel's special qualifications for undertaking a *Nibelungen* tragedy. These will be immediately apparent if we examine the dramatic aspects of the subject. We know that he expected to find dramatic themes particularly at the great transition periods in the world's history, when the old order gives place to a new. And in his imagination the *Nibelungenlied* shows us the Germanic world in the very act of yielding to the sign of the cross. Again, we think of the sacredness of the individual, which he so often emphasizes, especially in his great heroines, in Judith, Mariamne, and Rhodope. And the deception of Brunhild stands out as a preeminent example of this sin, for Brunhild is the medium of exchange between Siegfried and Gunther. Further, we recall his conception of character, that it should not be

finished but growing, we should see its beginning and its end. And none of his former themes could possibly have furnished him a person more adapted to this purpose than Kriemhild in her transition from a gentle girl to a demon of vengeance. We know that Hebbel was particularly impressed with this development in the acting of Christine, who played Raupach's Kriemhild. Then, too, in Siegfried we have the tragedy of individual excess, a transgression of the limits assigned to men. For Hagen reasons that if Siegfried cannot be wounded he has no right to fight and must be slain by fair means or foul, like the dragon in whose blood he bathed. Finally, the very difficulty presented by the mythical elements was attractive to a poet who was a mystic and who had faith enough to accept the wonderful without attempting to explain it.

Besides these striking relationships between his past works and his new material there was also, it seems, in Hebbel's own nature a subtle *rapproch* with the heroes of the old Germanic world, most of all with the grim Hagen, whose gaunt figure dominates the *Nibelungenlied* as well as Hebbel's tragedy. The indomitable courage with which Hebbel made room for himself in a hostile world, the unflinching assurance with which he asserted his opinions, the swift and uncompromising account he demanded of his enemies, the absolute honesty of combat, the self-reliance, the fearless anticipation of death—all these traits he shared with Hagen, whom he so successfully explains. Also he shared with him the self-consciousness that relies on innate strength rather than on grace or elegance, on elemental force rather than on tricks of convention. This personal sympathy is indicated in the dedicatory lines to his wife. He there relates how he first in his youth read the old story, and how its figures pursued him, and how, finally, when he had seen her play in Raupach's drama, they all came out of the past to greet him and Hagen Tronje spoke the first word. And true to this vision he opens his trilogy with a bold, characteristic utterance of Hagen, and Hagen is the center of interest in practically every important scene that follows, undaunted even by Siegfried, Etzel, and the mighty Dietrich of Berne.

Hebbel's chief source was the German *Nibelungenlied*, which best suited his determination to remain in the sphere of human motives. But he borrowed from Norse tradition as far as was necessary to furnish the background: the dim twilight of northern faith, the receding shadows of Wodan and his associate gods, the grotesque dwarfs of the underworld, the story of the dragon and its miraculous blood, the faint shimmer of mermaids and nixies, the norn-like inspiration of Brunhild and Frigga, her attendant, who was still under the influence of runes and their revelation—all this was necessary to give life and body to the characters of the tragedy. It was the atmosphere they breathed, the stuff of their stories and their dreams. But the poet excluded all this from his chain of motives. That is forged of links that we can touch and handle, so that it does not fade away when we seize it. Hebbel said that he found the greater part of this work done for him in advance by the unknown author, whom he assumed to have written the epic, and whom he considered a "dramatist from head to foot." His own rôle he conceived to be that of an interpreter.

Hebbel divides his material into three parts: a kind of prologue in one act, and two five act tragedies. These parts are *Siegfried*, *Siegfried's Death*, and *Kriemhild's Revenge*. The first is a thorough exposition of the whole situation. We are made acquainted with the Burgundian Court, Hagen, Volker, Gunther, and his brothers, his mother, Ute, and his sister, Kriemhild. In Hagen's opening words not only is the keynote of his bold, defiant character struck clearly, but the keynote of the conflict between the old Germanic and the new Christian world. Siegfried is introduced, he is victorious in the games, his history is told, and the expedition to Isenland for the purpose of overcoming Brunhild is planned. The importance of silence is emphasized dramatically at the end of the prologue by Hagen, who places his finger on his lips, looks at Siegfried and strikes on his sword.

Siegfried's Death shows in the first act how Brunhild is won by deceit. Hebbel keeps the actual combat wholly in the background and expends his chief energy in characteriz-

ing Brunhild as Valkyrie who has almost forgotten, but would like to recall, her origin and destiny. From Frigga she knows that she was destined to belong to the man who killed the dragon, and won the Nibelungen hoard. He would burst through the flaming wall that surrounded her castle and claim her for his possession. These deeds have been accomplished, the flames have disappeared, and yet the conqueror has not come. For, according to Hebbel's invention, Siegfried, rendered invisible by his magic cloak, had seen Brunhild when he broke through the fire, but had withdrawn untouched by her beauty. Frigga now fears she has misread the runes. As in the *Nibelungenlied*, when Siegfried and Gunther appear before her, she first addresses the former because of his commanding presence. But Siegfried represents himself as Gunther's retainer. Just before entering upon the combat which is to end in her defeat, she has a vision of her victory and her future domination of the world.

The second act relates the introduction of Brunhild in Worms, the double wedding, and the necessity of Siegfried again subduing the superhuman Brunhild for Gunther. In the third we see the fruits of deception. First of all Kriemhild's jealousy is aroused by the girdle that Siegfried accidentally retained from his second combat with Brunhild, and Siegfried, unskilled in deception, is forced to tell her the whole secret in order to satisfy her questions. This step is fatal because of the attitude and position of Brunhild and her presentiments of something amiss. Frigga encourages her in this state of mind, especially after learning that Siegfried is in possession of the Nibelungen hoard.

At this point in his tragedy Hebbel reached one of his chief difficulties. How should he represent the relation between Siegfried and Brunhild? The *Nibelungenlied* is not clear on this question, taking over Brunhild's hatred of Siegfried without a satisfactory explanation. The Norse tradition clears this up, to be sure, by telling of a magic potion that Kriemhild's mother gave Siegfried, causing him to desert Brunhild for her daughter. But Hebbel, having determined to remain within the sphere of human motives, could not use this explanation. He explains the motive of

hatred, which is suppressed jealousy, in a natural and satisfactory manner. From the first Brunhild had selected Siegfried as the greater man. She addressed her greeting to him first, and now that she is the wife of Gunther she cannot endure the seeming superiority of Siegfried. For Siegfried, modest as he is, cannot conceal his easy mastery. He is the real king. His efforts to play the retainer are as inadequate as his efforts to explain to his wife the presence of the girdle she has found. Brunhild has the feeling that her husband is inferior to Siegfried. She therefore, in full keeping with her character, urges him to conquer Siegfried, as she will not belong to any but the strongest man. To this demand he is of course unequal. It is this same state of mind in Brunhild from which the quarrel between the two women grows concerning their husbands, and thus the fatal secret that Kriemhild now possesses is revealed. When Brunhild realizes that the man whom the runes declared destined to conquer her has despised her for another, has even bartered her off to his inferior, her jealousy turns to hatred and she demands his death.

The remainder of this part shows Hagen's plans for revenge, the murder of Siegfried, and the cathedral scene where the wounds, bleeding anew upon Hagen's approach, prove him to be guilty. The great change in Kriemhild has begun. Over against her plea for justice, which Gunther, for fear of Hagen and because of his own guilt, denies her, stands the priest with his warning that vengeance belongs to the Lord. The priest says: "Think of him who forgave on the cross!" But Kriemhild replies: "Judgment! judgment! and if the King refuses it he himself is covered with this blood." Hitherto Kriemhild has been a follower of the new teaching, but now her passion sweeps its influence away and she begins that course of revenge which at last leads victim and avenger alike to destruction. Here at the close of *Siegfried's Death*, the Germanic and the Christian ideal fight for supremacy. Kriemhild chooses the sword only to perish by the sword.

This dramatic close of the second part of the trilogy is at the same time the initial chord of its third part, *Kriemhild's Revenge*. The difficulties inherent in the material of

this work were less successfully overcome by the poet. There is in it rather outward movement than dramatic action, and the underlying idea of transition from Germanic to Christian *Weltanschauung* finds little beyond a formal embodiment. The poet's intentions are the more apparent as his subject eludes his art. The third part of the trilogy has also met with less success on the stage than the other two parts.

The first act is concerned with Etzel's suit for Kriemhild's hand. As in the *Nibelungenlied*, the messenger is Rüdeger of Bechlaren. Hebbel is particularly careful to show us that Kriemhild accepts the new relation because it offers her the possibility of vengeance. Hagen's advice against the union determines her in favor of it. Only, however, when Gunther repeatedly refuses her demands for justice, does she consent to become Etzel's wife. Rüdeger, of whom she requires the fatal oath that binds him personally to her service, does not recognize in her the demonic qualities that subsequent events were destined to unfold. In this skilful way the gradual development of her nature is revealed. Not until all possible means have been exhausted to save her, does the poet allow the passion for revenge to sweep away all human sentiments in Kriemhild's heart. The second act deals with the events on the journey of the Burgundians to Etzel's court, whither Kriemhild has invited them. The act is divided into two scenes, one at the banks of the Danube, the other in the home of Rüdeger. Giselher is there betrothed to Rüdeger's daughter, as in the source. The whole act is kept in touch with the approaching catastrophe by the suspicious conduct of Kriemhild's messengers, and also by a direct warning from Dietrich of Bern, who appears at Rüdeger's house to warn the Burgundians of their impending danger.

Dietrich is one of the two main characters that Hebbel found necessary to bring out in stronger relief than was done in the source. The other is Etzel. Hebbel makes Dietrich the chief representative of Christianity among the great heroes of his tragedy. The *Nibelungenlied* says there were many Christians at Etzel's court. Hebbel needed a

concrete character for his purpose of showing the period of transition. It is, therefore, Dietrich who remains at last to receive the scepter that falls from Etzel's hands, and who has the courage to look into the future with a living faith. Hebbel characterizes him in this sense throughout the third part. He is one of the three great men who are free to act as seems best to them, since they are mightier than all others. And Etzel, himself one of them, admits that Dietrich is the greatest of them all. Following out the teaching of his new religion Dietrich voluntarily enters Etzel's service; no one, not even Etzel, knows why. And in the interest of peace he comes to warn the Burgundians. In all that follows his influence is thrown in the same direction.

Etzel likewise is given more prominence at the end. Etzel is in a difficult position. His wife demands vengeance upon the guests whom he has received in good faith. Not until the Burgundians are in his trust does he realize the full wrong done his wife by Hagen and Gunther and the significance of her invitation. He promises her full satisfaction, but as long as the Burgundians are under his roof he will protect them even at the risk of his life. This, however, does not satisfy Kriemhild, whom Hagen has enraged by renewed insults. She does not want him slain in open battle, she wants murder for murder. The Huns, induced by her promise of the Nibelungen hoard, begin the attack without Etzel's knowledge. Hagen retaliates by killing the King's child, and after these violent deeds the grand catastrophe can no longer be averted. Hebbel here throws another light on Etzel's character. Kriemhild had expected full and speedy revenge from what she knew of his fierce and implacable nature. She finds him different, however. He is surprisingly mild and gentle. This change had been wrought in him by a vision he saw when about to destroy Rome. Hebbel makes use of this legend in order to represent the pervasive influence of Christianity, and at the same time to explain Etzel's misunderstanding of the situation among the Burgundians. He knew that they were Christians and supposed that Kriemhild had forgiven the wrong done her, as that was "the custom among the Christians." This

temporary conversion makes his savage fury at the end all the more impressive.

As the monstrous catastrophe approaches, each of the main characters stands out in vivid outline. The bitter argument between Kriemhild and the defiant Hagen reveals the clear consciousness with which they occupy their respective positions. Hagen's course is made at least comprehensible and Kriemhild reaffirms the necessity of her action. It is in accord with Hebbel's plan to let the passions of the human heart flare up to their intensest heat, for only in this way can their consuming and destructive force be measured. In this moment the old Germanic world is on trial. Its ideals are given their fullest scope, the results are most comprehensively drawn. Whatever great and noble qualities this world may have developed, it now faces a situation where it is destroyed by its own contradictions. Dietrich sees this clearly before it comes. Hence his voluntary resignation of that power dearest to the Germanic heart, hence his consistent effort to pacify the warring elements, hence, too, his final insight into the necessity of the conflict. Hate must work its own destruction before a better condition can be established. "Wrong is here so interwoven with wrong that you cannot say to one: Stand back! Both have equal rights. If revenge does not turn shuddering from the last crumb no one can satisfy its terrible hunger."

And this is what happens. Of the Burgundians only Gunther and Hagen remain, of Etzel's men none but Dietrich and Hildebrant. Kriemhild puts an end to Gunther and Hagen, the latter with her own hands, and Hildebrant, who cannot bear to see the bravest of heroes beheaded by a woman, in a burst of fury avenges Hagen's death upon the Queen. Etzel should demand vengeance for this but he is weary of bloodshed. He gives over his scepter into Dietrich's hands with the words: "Drag the world further on your back." And Dietrich assumes this office "in the name of him who died on the cross." The transition is now complete. Hagen opens the trilogy with a demand in the Germanic spirit, Dietrich closes it with an obligation in the Christian spirit. The

second part ends with a plea for sacrifice instead of mercy, the third with the choice of mercy instead of sacrifice.

Hebbel's trilogy does not, like Wagner's *Nibelungen Ring*, bring out the destructive influence of the greed for gold as symbolized in the treasure of the Nibelungs. He merely hints at some such subtle influence, or curse, in a beautiful speech of Volker. But it is not made a central motive. It is usual for those who admire Wagner to disparage Hebbel. Yet a choice between the two is not only unnecessary, a comparison even is almost superfluous. The two works have entirely different purposes. The *Ring* gives us a tragedy of the gods, it is the *Götterdämmerung*. The freedom with which Wagner handled his sources, the variety and originality of new combinations that he made, were the very opposite of the method that Hebbel chose in his rôle of interpreter. It is unfair, however, to infer from this that Hebbel was a mere copyist, as was done by Wagner and his followers.

Personal as well as other considerations naturally kept Hebbel and Wagner apart. They seem to have met only once, and on that occasion pleasantly enough. Each was too dominating a personality, however, to endure the presence of the other for any length of time. Hebbel, upon whose musical discrimination widely divergent estimates have been placed, valued chiefly among Wagner's works *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*. His favorite composer was Mozart. He did not understand Wagner's later music, and as dramatist he naturally was not inclined to accept Wagner's theory demanding the fusion of music and poetry as elements in a higher unity. In his opinion each of these arts was sufficient unto itself, though each had a separate and distinct sphere. Poetry, he held, was the language of the spirit (*Geist*), music that of the heart. The definite analysis of character and motive possible in poetry was impossible in music, while on the other hand the emotional powers of music far surpassed anything poetry might hope to attain. Hebbel, it is true, had also reflected to some extent on the combination of the two arts. When Schumann undertook to make an opera of his *Genoveva*, he

depreciated the attempt because the drama in itself was already a complete expression, without the aid of music. We know too that he desired to have music complete the expression of his intentions in *Moloch*, which he had left less complete for that very purpose. In this respect we see something like an approach to Wagner's conception, though Hebbel evidently lacked the musical imagination to carry his idea further.

Unfortunately the two men were brought into conflict by their work on the same material, the *Nibelungen* saga. When Hebbel's *Nibelungen* appeared (1860), Wagner, who had privately printed a few copies of his *Ring* in 1853, published that work with a preface in which he accused his rivals (meaning Hebbel among others) of attempting to forestall him. In February of 1863 Hebbel then, strangely enough, wrote for Strodttmann's *Orion* (Hamburg) an anonymous review of the Wagner concerts being given at the Theater an der Wien, venting his sarcasm particularly on the *Ride of the Valkyries*. This review was not only unfair, it grew bitter toward the end. Hebbel, who had no calling as musical critic, appealed to the taste of an "unprejudiced public" to condemn Wagner's "chaos of tones," forgetting what he had on other occasions said of this same "unprejudiced public." After Hebbel's death, Wagner, in a pamphlet entitled *On Actors and Singers* (1872), attacked Hebbel's *Nibelungen* as an unoriginal imitation of the middle high German epic. He had discovered who wrote the anonymous review. His opinion of Hebbel's work was generally subscribed to by his large following, and it added another factor to the many that already restricted the poet's influence.

The *Nibelungen* finished, Hebbel's last complete drama was done. Time was not granted him to conclude a work, which even in its fragmentary condition is among his greatest. *Demetrius* was actually begun in 1858, though twenty years before that Hebbel had hinted at the dramatic idea—that of a false prince in doubt as to his real status. The historical story of the famous "false Demetrius," who claimed to be the son of Ivan the Terrible and who reigned in

Moscow during 1605-1606, proved to be the material he needed.

Schiller had died while at work on this subject, and Hebbel was destined to be overtaken by the same fate. Upon his death in 1863 he left four acts and the beginnings of a fifth. Besides this there is a prologue giving a complete exposition of the situation. Hebbel, who at first seems to have thought of completing Schiller's fragment, soon found that his own ideas conflicted with such a plan. The fundamental idea, however, that Demetrius really believes himself to be the rightful claimant to the throne of the czars, he took over from his predecessor. Schiller's Demetrius is, in the beginning, a frank and generous youth. He is suddenly convinced that he is the real son of Ivan and that the ruling czar, Boris Gudonov, is a usurper who attempted to murder him, the rightful heir, as a child. Strong in this belief in a just cause he wins over the nobles to his side, and, especially, he induces the old czarina to acknowledge him as her son. She does this less from conviction than from a desire to be revenged on Boris for the horrors she has suffered at his hands. Boris is defeated and takes his own life, leaving Demetrius to reign in his stead. This is the height of Demetrius' power. He now discovers that he has been deceived and that he is not Ivan's son at all. By killing the only man that knows this secret he keeps the truth in his sole possession, and according to Schiller's plans—not quite two acts were finished—the tragic change in him begins. It begins with an unwilling deed of violence and grows in the same direction until Demetrius is a different man. Before, he had been generous and kind in the full confidence of a just cause, now he becomes suspicious of his advisers and tyrannical in his measures. His inner uncertainty transmits itself to his surroundings, his despotism makes him unpopular, his enemies are ready to use the whispered doubt of his birth-right against him, at the critical moment the old czarina, fully convinced that he is not her son, fails to support him, and he is overthrown. This was a clear and striking tragic idea.

Hebbel follows Schiller in making Demetrius believe in

himself, though he is more careful to set forth the reasons of that faith. He thinks Schiller presupposes too much and is not enough concerned with explaining his persons and occurrences. This explanation he gives us in the prologue. As a result his Demetrius is probably a more convincing character than Schiller's, a stronger, more imperious person. He is really the son of Ivan, though his mother was a servant girl. This explains his resemblance to the czar—accidental in Schiller—and also gives him his natural inclination to rule. Between his spirit and bearing, naturally those of a king, and his position in the house of a Polish nobleman, there is a sharp contrast. In this situation Hebbel is said to have portrayed the conflicts of his own youth. Demetrius' natural manner offends both high and low. He has never known what it means to fit simply into a given place in life. The discovery that he is Ivan's son, legitimate as he thinks, corresponds exactly to his innermost feelings, and he accepts the new situation as an inheritance too long withheld.

This attitude on his part is the condition of the tragedy, as Hebbel conceives it. For if the belief that he is the czar means life for Demetrius, the discovery that he is not will mean his death. This is Hebbel's dramatic theme, and it differs from Schiller's to the extent that his Demetrius is a more decided person than Schiller's. Schiller's hero resolves from purely inner motives to continue the deception, while Hebbel's hero realizes from purely inner motives that he cannot. Not the course of events but his own character, is what forces him to stand confessed. He knows from the beginning what Schiller's Demetrius learns at the end—the hopelessness of trying to appear what he is not.

Hebbel carefully prepares us for this somewhat idealistic solution. In many ways in the course of his drama the sacredness of the principle of succession among the Russians is emphasized as the only security of the state. Power, talent for leadership could not in themselves constitute the right, because in that event the country would be forever exposed to the ambition of some new adventurer. Demetrius accepts this principle absolutely. Not only does it give him strength

and justification in his battles, it imposes these battles on him as a duty. He respects his opponent, Boris, but finds even in a wise government no excuse for usurpation. The reality of his claim is the only source of his power, and the loss of his power necessarily follows his discovery that the claim is false. He finds himself in the same position as the man whom he has displaced. This lames his hand in the decisive moment. One of the chief nobles is caught plotting against him. A word from him and the beheading of this ringleader would settle all controversy. But what would have seemed simple justice to him before the fatal discovery, now becomes a murder in his sight. He therefore pardons Shuisky, who afterwards really displaces him. With him the crisis is sudden and fatal in proportion to the purity and energy of his character, to the singleness of his purpose. As the fragment stands the catastrophe must have been very swift, for only one act is left in which Shuisky can work out the actual rebellion. All this, with the death of Demetrius, had to be provided for in that brief compass. Hebbel's exact intentions regarding the ending of his drama were never expressed, but it would seem certain that the hero was to be murdered at the moment of his highest moral triumph, the only solution in harmony with his portrayal throughout the work.

Hebbel has been often blamed for the final resignation of his Demetrius, as if that stamped him a sentimental weakling. That is to misunderstand the fine moral quality of the character. Demetrius is no wordy hero, indulging in a vague, rhetorical idealism. He is a human being with a passion for justice and truth, unfortunately rare, but none the less human. He is unwilling to make any compromise with the devious ways by which his supporters would further his cause. But it is the consciousness of his position and proper power that give him strength to rebuke them. He lacks every quality of the usurper. Whether, as rightful ruler, he would have been able to assert himself permanently by his straightforward methods, is another question, and a possible tragedy that Hebbel did not write.

The work, while unfinished and unfiled, shows a master's

hand throughout. Hebbel had now fully attained his real style. His language is thoroughly sensuous, if somewhat compact and serious. He had made a careful study of local conditions, traveling to Cracow for first hand impressions. His characters all have a local habitation and name. As a background we find the idea of the state, and also religious intrigues on the part of the Roman Catholic Church, which rescued Demetrius in order to use him for its purposes. In the characters Hebbel did some of his best work. In Marina he attempted something new to him, the naïve and capricious woman. While notably successful in this, his characterization of the omnipresent, officious, and evil Otrepiep must be considered a masterpiece of first order. Equally good is the old mother of Demetrius, in her timidity, her resignation, her overflowing love, which betrays itself in spite of her. Particularly noticeable is the ease and clearness with which the rich material is organized. The complex racial elements of the empire, the pleasure-loving Poles, the faithful Russians, the unruly Cossacks, are made to pass before us in different parts of the picture. The populace in Moscow is presented in well chosen types as Demetrius enters the city on his triumphal march. On the whole we have the impression of a thoroughly ordered and individual work of art.

CHAPTER XV

THEORY AND PRACTICE. STYLE. HEBBEL AND THE STAGE

AFTER having examined Hebbel's most important theoretical views, and presented, at least in outline, the individual products of his genius, it is desirable to sum up in a general way the characteristic facts of his tragic interpretation of life. Do his dramas exemplify his theory? If not, what do they exemplify? What is his relation to the Greeks, to Shakespeare, and to the modern drama?

It is customary now to accept the evolutionary view of Hebbel's dramatic theory, to assume that he wished to show the life-process as a steady development from lower to higher in human history, that he therefore placed his tragedies at some crisis or turning-point in history, and that the individual, anticipating the future order, is sacrificed to the existing one. It is not certain, however, just what kind of evolution Hebbel believed in. He did recognize a continuation of the life-process, he regarded the "act of creation" as unfinished. But more than once, and up to the last, he hesitated to define the direction of this "act of creation." With this limitation, we may accept the evolutionary view of his theory, as justified in his *Preface to Mary Magdalene* and elsewhere, and also as applicable to certain of his tragedies. The method, however, is not that of showing the individual as the martyr to a new truth, so much as showing the old order breaking down because of its inherent contradictions.

Before enquiring which of the dramas illustrate this standpoint, we may recall three other, more general principles underlying all Hebbel's theorizing and illustrated in all his tragedies. First, as the basis of all tragedy, is set the critical relation between individual and society, of which he is the product. Further, the tragic individual must be presented in his growth in the conflict resulting

from the critical relation. And finally, the mere exertion of individual will, and not its direction (for "good" or "bad") occasions the tragic conflict. Hebbel never modified these opinions about the tragedy.

The evolutionary standpoint depends, as we have seen, upon the conflict within the Idea, or, to be concrete, within the social order in question. Logically it can exist only when the social order breaks down because of its inner instability. It is the dissolution of the social complex. It would not exist when the individual is shattered, even in an excellent or reasonable undertaking, against the wall of impregnable tradition. The latter case would give us the tragedy of the "critical relation" in its pure form. Of these two types the former is progressive, the latter conservative. Together they illustrate the peculiar two-faced standpoint occupied by Hebbel as a practical necessity of life. The expression here used is not meant to convey a reproach. A really evolutionary point of view must embrace the two others. Hebbel's letters to Gustav Kühne (1847) show him as the progressive, who finds the trouble with the world to be a conflict between "unjustifiable laws and freer developing personalities." Ten years later he writes to Baron Cotta: "Perhaps more than any one else I have battled for the basic foundations of human society, which in our times are threatened on all sides." It is true he was older, and he had seen a revolution in the meantime, but he even classes his early productions under the same heading. Of the second period he declares: "*Herod* celebrates Christianity as a most sublime instrument of civilization,¹ *Michelangelo* preaches humility, *Agnes Bernauer* presents the state as the basis of all human prosperity, *Gyges* reminds us of the eternal rights of custom (*Sitte*) and tradition. These pieces have their great faults but the general spirit to which they owe their being is not to be despised in a time that would upset everything and make the world over."² In reality these two statements are not contradictory, though Hebbel himself may have been in very different moods when he wrote them.

¹ This sentence is worded with noteworthy care.

² Br. VI, 75.

They are both comprehended within the attitude which values fundamental social forms evolved through long experience, while at the same time it does not accept their ossification. Just as Hebbel, in 1848, desired concessions by both sides, so in his tragedies he teaches the sanctity of tradition on the one hand and its dangers on the other. And while, broadly speaking, it is true that he began more as a radical and ended more as a conservative, he was never an extremist either way. In this respect his works reflect his nature faithfully.

If we wish to classify Hebbel's works according to the division just made we see that neither *Judith* nor *Genoveva* represents the evolutionary type. *Judith* is sacrificed as the savior of a particular society, Holofernes is sacrificed as its enemy. Golo is wrecked on the reefs of passion, in conflict with the imperturbable spirit of Christian humility. Siegfried is ruined by his own blindness to a spiritual value of life. *Mary Magdalene*, however, is evolutionary, to the extent that it shows the old order bankrupt. With that it ends. For awhile it seemed as if Hebbel would continue the criticism of contemporary society. *Julia* is decidedly of this type. Here he came nearest to discussing a restricted problem. But becoming alarmed at the narrowness and particularity of his work, he resolved henceforth to assail no problem unrelieved by the freedom and expanse of an historical horizon.

The first drama written from this larger point of view was *Herod and Mariamne*, which belongs to the evolutionary type. Here the new order is somewhat more clearly indicated than in *Mary Magdalene*, but after all the most striking thing in the tragedy is the collapse of the old. There are three tragic characters in the drama, and all three meet ruin at the hands of the old order of revenge and hate: Herod by adopting its principles, Mariamne and Soemus by opposing them, at least in part. Herod, though he lives on, is the most tragic of them all. His good qualities have been perverted. His intelligence has become cunning, his fidelity has yielded to suspicion, his courage and resolution only render his despotism more frightful. He stands before us

at last like a man dazed, half conscious of what has happened to him, yet driven by despair to keep on the same fatal course. Mariamne turns shuddering from a world that is without a soul. The time represented in this drama is really a period of transition, and in that sense it represents an actual historical phase of human history. Hebbel considered it, however, none the less a social drama, and a warning to his own times in that it taught respect for individuality.

In *Agnes Bernauer* and *Gyges*, on the other hand, Hebbel, reacting to some extent against the excesses of the revolution, made use of the conservative possibilities of his theory. He estimated these works truly, according to their main impression, in his letter to Cotta: "*Agnes Bernauer* presents the state as the basic element of all human prosperity, and *Gyges* reminds us of the eternal rights of custom and tradition." Both in *Agnes* and *Albrecht* we have the tragedy of the critical relation between individual and society in its pure form. In *Agnes* Hebbel wished to represent the tragedy of beauty, and in *Albrecht* that of a future ruler who has not yet learned the resignation of his individual happiness to the good of his subjects. Though victorious in battle he is converted to the standpoint of his father—not to ask what a thing is but what it means. The tragedy does not close with the messengers of a new order but with the legate of the Pope and the emblems of the Holy Roman Empire. For the poet again, however, it symbolized a new order, an order in which the individual should realize the meaning of the state and the state be conscious of its mission among men. As Duke *Albrecht* was plainly intended for the rebellious radicals, so was Duke *Ernst* meant for the reactionary despots of his day. *Gyges* is an even more striking example of what things signify beyond what they are. What is a veil, what are old swords and rusty crowns? Nothing—in themselves. But they signify the love of a woman and the life of a nation. *Kandaules* perishes in his disregard of them but the social order is undisturbed. In these two dramas it seems almost as if Hebbel had purposely chosen the most extreme cases to embody his view of life.

It is evident that the *Nibelungen* belongs to the evolu-

tionary type, the entire background being the Germanic world as it changes into a new order. The individuals, however, in this immense work can be referred to both types. Those who work out their own destruction most consistently by adhering to the old order are Hagen and Kriemhild. Siegfried's tragedy is that of the too favored individual, while Brunhild's fate is similar to that of Mariamne and Rhodope. There is no trace of an evolutionary idea in *Demetrius*. This fragment is in the same class with *Agnes Bernauer* and *Gyges*, in that it illustrates the dependence of the individual on society and his responsibility to it. The *Moloch* fragment, on the other hand, clearly shows us a transition period. Here the individual, Hieram, fails to comprehend the real meaning of the change. The fragment, therefore, emphasizes the reality of the social will at the same time that it shows the birth of a new order.

We come now to our next question: In what relation does Hebbel stand to the Greeks and Shakespeare? In his *Preface to Mary Magdalene*, as we have seen, he attempted a threefold historical classification of the drama, into Greek, Shakespearean, and a third type, which would be the last. The conflict in one is between fate and the individual, in the second it is in the individual himself, and in the third it is in the moral order that symbolizes the Idea. We see why Hebbel, from his adherence to the Idea in a speculative way at that time, was forced to limit the possibilities to three. This, however, was a formalistic analysis that might have led him to distrust his presuppositions. The proposition, for example, that Shakespeare shows the conflict in the individual, if it means that no "divine antagonist" is discernible, cannot be maintained.

We can, however, approach the question in a more empirical way, and then we indeed find in Hebbel certain qualities connecting him with the Greeks on one hand and Shakespeare on the other. It is, of course, hazardous to limit the effect of Greek tragedy, or Shakespearean tragedy, by this or that term, and one is refreshed to find De Quincey defending free will in Greek tragedy, or Volkelt recording the impression of fate in Shakespeare. This fact empha-

sizes the truth of Hebbel's assertion that good art always includes the individual and the universal at one and the same time. Art must do this because life does it in some incomprehensible fashion. One phase of Greek tragedy, however, may certainly be expressed in the following words of Professor Butcher.³ "Greek tragedy in its most characteristic examples, dramatizes not the mere story of human calamities, but the play of great principles, the struggle between contending moral forces. The heroes themselves are the embodiment of these forces. Religion, the State, the Family—these were to a Greek the higher and enduring realities, the ideal ends for which he lived." These words have a familiar sound to students of Hebbel. They embody what he also demands of the drama. For him, too, these great moral forces must be felt as supreme in the tragedy. Religion? Who does not recall *Moloch*? The State? We have *Agnes Bernauer* and *Demetrius*. The Family? There is *Mary Magdalene*. The characteristic distinction is that Hebbel often shows these great moral forces not undivided, but as undergoing a change. Yet back of it all he claims to have given his life to establishing them on a firmer basis.

Character development, on the other hand, is not a part of Greek tragedy. "In this sense we may admit that the modern drama has brought the delineation of character into a new and stronger relief."⁴ In this respect, needless to repeat, Hebbel is firmly on modern ground both in theory and practice. To combine character development with the impression of great moral forces in conflict was his supreme end. That is why he wants Shakespearean vividness in the main scenes and Sophoclean composition in the whole work. Does he attain this? On no question regarding Hebbel is opinion more divided. It is not sufficient that we see individuals in a psychological conflict, and also see a certain background of conflicting general forces. The two conflicts must be so interwoven as to make a unified impression. Each

³ Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, Macmillan, Fourth edition, p. 360.

⁴ Butcher, op. cit. p. 365.

must continually act upon and condition the other. Before the publication of his *Preface*, Hebbel complained that his persons were taken too strictly as individuals. Later he never ceased complaining of the opposite. His plays were supposed to "represent" all kinds of things that he never dreamed of. He insisted that he took his method of work only from the particular subject in hand, and not from any theory. On the whole he was right in this assertion. The actual result is, as we have said, varyingly estimated. Otto Ludwig, for example, considered Hebbel's problems *kultur-historisch* rather than psychological. The fate of his persons was rather the product of their times than of their own action. His tragedies presented views rather than persons. The opposite view is held by many. Volkelt among others sees in the characters only individuals and abnormal individuals at that. That is, they would represent nothing except themselves, or their author, not even an instance of human destiny, to say nothing of a phase of human history at the same time.

The word "representative," when applied to characters, might mean several things. Judith, for example, might represent woman degraded in her most sacred feelings, she might represent a Jewish woman of a certain period, and she might symbolize the conflict between Judaism and heathenism. If she should represent all three she would do what Hebbel claimed for her. That she does not do the last seems evident, and Vischer, for example, believed it to be her chief fault that she did not do the second. The coincidence of all these circles was what Hebbel strove for more and more, and by that his progress should be judged. Herod comes much nearer the threefold capacity of man becoming tyrant, of a citizen of the world at the birth of Christ, and of a victim of a passing order symbolized in his own soul. The representative nature of this drama may be well seen by contrasting it with the more personal treatment of the same theme by Stephen Phillips. It would be useless to register a personal opinion on each of the dramas in this regard. A detailed discussion would be necessary in order to draw any safe conclusions.

Hebbel's relation to Shakespeare is no less interesting. Practically he preserved his independence of Shakespeare. Shakespeare, he said, was in every way a privileged exception, to be carefully studied but never imitated. Whatever shortcomings he had in one direction were more than balanced in another. Among these shortcomings Hebbel placed first the superabundant wealth of detail. This, he thought, endangered the composition as a whole. We have already noticed his preference for the Greek type in this respect. But perhaps after all the real point at issue was contained in Hebbel's assertion, which was quite in keeping with the esthetic of his day, that Shakespeare placed the conflict in the individual. In so far as this may mean that Shakespeare excluded what Hebbel termed the "divine antagonist," it must be considered open to objection. A less dogmatic view of life than that held by the absolute philosophy puts a different aspect on this question. The "divine antagonist" in Shakespeare may be less easy to define, may show more of the elusiveness and mystery of organic life, may be less rational than the Idea, or its representatives, and yet lose none of its reality and importance. This has been adequately shown by Professor Bradley in his *Shakespearean Tragedy*.⁵

Professor Bradley finds in "the impression of waste" the central tragic impression in Shakespeare. Human tragedy becomes a symbol for the universal tragedy in life, it summons up a power beyond human power. The analysis, or description, of this power which Professor Bradley gives us, is especially satisfactory and comprehensive. It is a dualistic thing, he says, neither definable as a "moral order," nor as "blind fate," though combining in itself qualities of each. "Thus we are left at last with an idea showing two sides or aspects which we can neither separate nor reconcile. The whole or order against which the individual part shows itself powerless seems to be animated by a passion for perfection; we cannot otherwise explain its behaviour towards evil. Yet it appears to engender this evil within

⁵ Macmillan, Second edition, 1914. See especially Lecture I.

itself and in its effort to overcome and expel it, it is agonized with pain and driven to mutilate its own substance and to lose not only evil but priceless good."

These words would be a satisfactory statement of the tragedy of Golo. In this type the tragic issue proceeds from the bosom of the world directly, not indirectly through the faults of a social order. For that reason it contains more of the inexplicable mystery of life. The drama that deals with a particular social problem, the thesis-drama in the strict sense, represents the opposite extreme. Hebbel wrote no drama of this extreme type. He asserted, however, that all his dramas had a social basis. Only, as a rule, he employed tradition or history to give them a broader foundation and a more significant sweep. The problems are referred, in other words, not to a set of conventions, but to the whole of human existence. It is still human existence symbolized, or represented in certain great institutions. In Shakespeare, on the other hand, the individual faces a still less restricted order, an order as broad, as mysterious, as indefinable as the thing we call life itself, yet none the less potent in determining its fate. From this point of view it might be said that Hebbel created only two characters who, as a whole, put their questions directly and squarely to the Universe: Holofernes and Golo. All the others are more or less socialized. These two are hence his genuine Shakespearean characters.

In many particular respects, however, Hebbel's characters would accord with Shakespeare. Generally they are conspicuous persons suffering an extraordinary fate. To what extent in his dramas "character is destiny" may be inferred from the entire previous discussion. Of Shakespeare Professor Bradley says: "In almost all (his characters) we observe a certain onesidedness, a predisposition in some particular direction; a total incapacity, in certain circumstances, of resisting the force which draws in this direction; a fatal tendency to identify the whole being with one interest, object, passion or habit of mind. This, it would seem, is for Shakespeare the fundamental tragic fact." (Op. cit. p. 20). These words are entirely in accord with Hebbel's first

essay, and they also fit Holofernes and Golo perfectly, as well as all Hebbel's persons more or less.

If, as Professor Bradley asserts, "the source of the convulsion" in Shakespeare is never good, but plain moral evil, this is not a part of Hebbel's theory. And it could find only a restricted application in his practice. Hebbel tended more and more to write the tragedy of innocence. Characters like Agnes Bernauer and Demetrius are led to a tragic end by their very perfection. In Hebbel's view, the "critical relation" into which the individual may come with reference to the whole is independent of such considerations.

An important matter with regard to the emotional impression of Hebbel's tragedies is their casuistry, if that term may be used. That is, in most of them we are made conscious of a "problem," and the poet is careful, too careful, to convince us of the absolute necessity of his solution. The word necessity (*Notwendigkeit*) was one that he liked to use with reference to his dramas, and it throws considerable light on the degree of his determinism. A tragic action, necessary in its completeness, indissolubly woven of acting and suffering, of the deeds of the protagonist and the will of "divine antagonist"—such was his desire for his dramas. "In not a few Greek tragedies it is almost inevitable that we should think of justice and retribution, not only because the *dramatis personæ* often speak of them, but also because there is something casuistical about the tragic problem itself. The poet treats the story in such a way that the question, Is the hero doing right or wrong? is almost forced upon us. But this is not so with Shakespeare. *Julius Cæsar* is probably the only one of his tragedies in which the question suggests itself to us, and this is one of the reasons why that play has something of a classic air."⁶ Here again we find a divergence of Hebbel from the Shakespearean form, a divergence which was no doubt a part of his conscious program. And in this respect, too, he is closer to the Greeks on one side and Ibsen on the other.

It has long been customary to name Hebbel and Ibsen

⁶ Bradley, *op. cit.* p. 33.

together. We know that Ibsen saw *Mary Magdalene* in Dresden and was deeply impressed by it. He is also said to have expressed his wonder that the Germans received his dramas with enthusiasm, while neglecting their own Hebbel. It is at once apparent that both poets have in common a fondness for probing deep into the problems of life, and their strength lies in their treatment of the psychology of their characters. Both also show their persons changing under conditions which largely make them. The analytical technique of the Greeks, which Hebbel used to some extent in various dramas, and particularly in *Mary Magdalene* and *Julia*, Ibsen made a chief principle of his composition. Both looked upon Christianity as a transitional form, destined to undergo a synthesis with the Greek ideal. Ibsen, however, regarded social corruption as the tragic sin of mankind, and he was much more radical in demanding changes than Hebbel, who occupied an evolutionary standpoint. Ibsen sides with his radical characters, and does not sacrifice the individual to the Idea or society as such at all. He sought no metaphysical background except in one tragedy, *Emperor and Galilean*, in which he reached conclusions similar to Hebbel's dualism. He made no attempt, in his other dramas, to draw characters and action against this background. Both Ibsen and Hebbel place poetry above religion, and neither sets up a definite ethical system. Ibsen's ethical demand was: Be yourself, be true. He at first would admit no social lies, but later demonstrated the need of them in *The Wild Duck*. Hebbel, like Nietzsche, never doubted their necessity. Ibsen saw the highest individuality in the fulfilment of duty. Hebbel made respect for another's individuality the center of his teaching. In both, woman is defended as an individual and triumphs as such. This victory of woman, which Hebbel proclaims clearly enough, is emphasized more and more by Ibsen and his followers. And finally, to conclude this very brief summary, both expected salvation from the great individual, not, like Tolstoi, from the masses.

After this general estimate of the nature of Hebbel's drama, we may enquire briefly into his use of language, his

views on "realism," his attitude to the stage and his success upon it. All the writers on Hebbel's style, as far as I am acquainted with them, are agreed that he was no innovator in the use of words. His importance as a dramatist depends more on the ideal aspects of his work, such as the formulation of the tragic conflict, or psychological analysis, than on his specific power of language. This does not mean that he failed to attain an adequate individual expression for his thought, but merely that he was not a language-maker on a large scale. He introduced a number of expressions into usage, some of them from his native low German dialect. But his principle was conservative and purely esthetic. He had no desire, like his famous contemporary, Klaus Groth, to quicken the refined literary language with racier expressions from the dialect. He employed low German words chiefly when no exact high German equivalent was available. His vocabulary, therefore, is essentially that of Goethe and Schiller, with some influence of Lessing and Kleist, and an occasional borrowing from his contemporaries. A modification of the classical style in the direction of realism is noticeable. If Goethe was more careful than Schiller to avoid colloquial language in his verse, Hebbel is in this respect freer than Schiller. His prose dramas, on the other hand, are less colloquial than the prose dramas of the Storm and Stress period. Thus from both directions he seemed to strive for a golden mean proper to his own talent. He did not attempt to gain realism in the manner of Kleist, whose dramas show a distinct separation between the colloquial passages and those transfigured by impetuous eloquence and passion, but rather to develop an harmonious whole, uniting the vigor of everyday speech with the elegance of the classic tradition. Many critics consider that this effort reduced his entire style to a point below the highest poetic beauty.

The total impression made by Hebbel's style, is that it is the product of a mind characterized by logical incisiveness on the one hand and passion and eloquence on the other. The qualities of Lessing seem in him to be transfused and potentialized by a higher poetic imagination, a more elemental emotion. Antithesis, so much used in his *Judith*, re-

mained a favorite figure with him, and even the moments of highest passion seem not to be entirely deserted by the guiding hand of reflection. His problem, as Deiters well puts it, was to fuse three elements at first existing more or less side by side in his writings: rhetorical sweep, epigrammatic pithiness, and a decided trend toward realism. His best works mark a steady gain in this power of fusion, the *Nibelungen* perhaps showing the greatest mastery in introducing colloquial expressions without detriment to the poetic tone of the language.

Hebbel's language is very sensuous. He thinks largely in figures of speech, the distinguishing mark of the poetic mind. The eye is the chief organ of sense employed in this process, sound playing a much less important rôle. Also, especially in the beginning, the figures drawn from nature and animal life are more or less traditional and stereotyped, and only gradually rise to individual significance. Those taken from human life, however, are from the first more numerous and more original. This is a confirmation of what Hebbel's works reveal to us otherwise, that he awakened slowly to an appreciation of nature. His primary interest was man. He once put this in his drastic fashion: "I don't live on June-bugs, I live on people." Equally interesting is the discovery made by many who have examined his figurative expressions closely, that there is in them a certain recurrence, or repetition, which shows a rhythmic movement of his mind in this particular. Or, put in a different way, the circle of his sensuous imagination is rather restricted. Every poet, of course, has his own circle, great or small, as no imagination is unlimited. But while many strive continually to enlarge these limits, Hebbel seemed, as Meszlèny says, more concerned to attain perfect ease and precision within them. Meszlèny also affirms that Hebbel's figures of speech follow the approved lines of the classicists, except that his realism makes frequent room for itself in the Shakespearean oxymoron, in its broadest sense.

Hebbel's dialogue at its best may claim the dramatic qualities described by him in the essay, already quoted, on style in the drama. He had two particular dangers to over-

come: the tendency to make his dialogue monological, burdened with long "asides," or interrupted only in a perfunctory manner; and second, the same division into logic and passion at first noticeable in his language. In his mature works both of these weaknesses have been overcome. That he was no innovator in a technical sense is shown by his extended use of the monologue. He believed that the monologue was justifiable, even necessary, in order to show the dualism or essential contradiction within the character. But he by no means employed this device indiscriminately. Again a definite progress is observable. His early dramas often use monologues for exposition or for making connections. Later, beginning particularly with *Herod and Mariamne*, these forms practically disappear. In general the monologue is of less importance in the second period of his work. Hebbel avoids in his dramas all description and narrative for their own sake, resolving such elements into an integral part of the action. He is more careful than Schiller to suppress reflective maxims that might be good to quote but ill suit the situation or person. This function of the antique chorus is more rigidly resolved into the organic connection of his dialogue. When compared with dramas of more modern workmanship Hebbel's most realistic play, *Mary Magdalene*, seems long out of date. If it had to depend on its "realism" in that sense it would be hopelessly outclassed. In this respect Hebbel, as Wallberg says, was behind his predecessor, Kleist, to say nothing of his contemporary, Otto Ludwig. This brings us again to a fundamental question of Hebbel's views on poetry. He said that his realism was psychological. There are, as we have seen, certain realistic elements in his language, and he usually adapts his similes to the person employing them, but even that would perhaps be only an illustration of his psychological realism. He makes no attempt to use dialect, or any particular mode of speech. His strength lay in his sure insight into psychic states resulting from a given environment, and it was these which he was most concerned to show. The people in *Judith* are presented from the standpoint of their religious consciousness, those in *Mary Magda-*

lene we know to be born and bred in a narrow and stifling middle-class atmosphere, those in the *Nibelungen* are the product of a bold, untamed defiance, of trust in bodily strength, of conflict with wild nature, of intimacy with elemental forces. Meszlèny has called attention to the striking effect of *isolation* on the mood, action, and characters in *Genoveva*. And so of all his great dramas.

It was consciously, therefore, that Hebbel turned away from consistent realism, just as he turned away from the drama of contemporary social conditions. His reason is instructive for his whole attitude toward life. Not long before his death he wrote to Engländer his final conclusions on the functions and functioning of the poetic talent. To his friend, who had compared poetic talent with something divine, Hebbel replied that a more suitable position for it would be between animal instinct and human reason. It is a mistake to see resignation in this statement, as has been done in several places. Hebbel never conceded any comparative lowering of poetry in the scale of human faculties. In this letter he declares that life is not a logical process, not reducible to logic, and hence, as a whole, not best interpretable by reason at all. Poetry, however, he says in the same place, is that faculty in man by which he can fathom depths inaccessible to him in any other way. It can do this by reason of that natural and indefinite *rapport* between the poetic, creative mind and the life-process. His explanation of poetic insight reminds us somewhat of Bergson's explanation of the marvels of animal instinct. The poet does not attempt to solve the mystery of life in clear terms, he merely follows out the hidden laws of his nature, and he is sure that these laws are at the same time the laws of life. What he produces does not explain but symbolizes. The fruits of his mind are not accidental prodigies, they are a continuation of the processes of life, and hence they necessarily reflect these processes in their essential nature. This view at once gave him firm ground for his attitude to realism. Why should he copy the world, when, as he believes, "the imagination draws from the same depths as those from which the world itself . . . arose?" He felt himself bound

to observe only the laws of the human mind as exactly as he could.

Hebbel's attitude to the stage underwent, in the course of time, a slight change. His own natural instinct for the effective stage-picture was perhaps somewhat deficient. He was not always concerned to obtain variety and vividness in this respect. When he wrote *Judith* he was uncertain how it would appear on the stage, and in *Genoveva* he considered the stage very little, with the unfortunate results we have seen. At first he seems to have made some sort of distinction between the drama and the stage-play. He told the King of Denmark that under existing conditions there was a distinction, though there should be none. Later, however, he always wrote with the definite idea of having the play given, and his last complete drama, the *Nibelungen*, was one of his most successful in this respect. He gave no directions as to scenery, costume, or acting, and apparently had little interest in them. He left such things to be inferred from his text. He was opposed to realism on the stage as in the drama, and agreed with Laube in emphasizing the importance of the spoken word above all else. Though not slavish in regard to the time and place of the action, he recognized the value of concentration in this particular. After *Genoveva* he made the scene correspond chiefly with the act, until *Agnes Bernauer* broke this rule. But his effort to make no unreasonable demands of the theater as it existed is plain. When he had anything to do with the staging of his works he was very willing to accept advice and suggestions.

We have seen that Hebbel's dramas had a very moderate success on the stage during his lifetime. Laube denied that they were suited for the stage, while Dingelstedt held the opposite view. A well-known modern director, Alfred Freiherr von Berger, has interesting comments on the same matter. In his *Dramaturgic Lectures* (Vienna 1890) he expressed the opinion that Hebbel, while knowing the souls of his characters as few poets do, was less acquainted than he should have been with their superficial expression. In 1907-08 Freiherr von Berger gave a cycle of all Hebbel's

plays in the German Playhouse in Hamburg. Whether or not this experience may have modified his previous opinion in any way, his book entitled *My Hamburg Dramaturgy* (1910) speaks somewhat more favorably of Hebbel. Here he still recognizes in his work great difficulties, but also great possibilities for the careful director. Hebbel's dramas are a challenge to the stage, they represent a task and an education, a charm and a reward for director and actor.⁷

The actual fate of Hebbel's dramas on the stage may now be briefly indicated. Ten of his dramas were given two hundred times in the Burgtheater between May, 1848, and January, 1884. (Frankl, op. cit. p. 71.) These figures cannot, of course, be measured by the present day standards, when practical conditions have entirely changed. *Mary Magdalene* led the list, and this play seems to have had more influence on the stage than any other written by Hebbel. The first two parts of the *Nibelungen* trilogy, and *Judith* followed closely, and then, at considerable distance, the third part of the trilogy and *Agnes Bernauer*. *Herod and Mariamne* was given only once, that being the initial performance, as we have seen. This drama was also a failure in Berlin in 1874. But it met with great success in the Royal Playhouse there in 1899, with Matkowski as Herod and Rosa Poppe as Mariamne. Here the Three Kings, who had only aroused the amusement of the earlier audience, proved to be quite effective. (Bühne und Welt, I Jahrgang, 2 Teil, 708.) Between October, 1902, and September, 1903, nine of Hebbel's dramas were given, on all stages, one hundred and thirty six times, the most popular being in order, the *Nibelungen* (I and II), *Mary Magdalene*, *Judith*, *Nibelungen* III, and *Gyges*. *Herod and Mariamne* is lacking in this list. A great revival of Hebbel's plays came in the year 1907-08. It is generally believed that Ibsen's influence in the problem play, and his education of actors and audiences, gradually opened the way for Hebbel. The cycle in Hamburg in 1907-08 has already been mentioned. In Berlin the *Nibelungen* and *Gyges* were among the most popu-

⁷ Op. cit., pp. 205, 215.

lar plays of the season. *Judith* was also much in demand. At the Dresden Court Theater Hebbel led all dramatists in that season.⁸ An interesting experiment was made with Hebbel, among others, by Ernst Wachler, who gave the dramas in the open, in the Harz Mountain Theater at Thale, in Aachen and elsewhere. He gave the *Moloch* fragment successfully in 1905, *Gyges* in 1909, and *Genoveva* in 1912. He mentions particularly the effect of the magic scenes in the last named work. The most successful play was the *Nibelungen* (I and II) in 1910, which was hailed by overflow crowds as a great popular spectacle. On the whole, however, Wachler thinks the Shakespearean form of drama better suited to out-of-door performances. (Bühne und Welt, 16 Jahrgang, 1 Halbjahr, 274.) It is also interesting to notice that in Wesselburen a Hebbel stage is supported, on which simple working people give his plays. This stage has occupied the first floor of the Hebbel House since the opening of that building in March, 1911. The occasion was celebrated by the presentation of the *Nibelungen*, the first part with particular success.

We may close this brief review of Hebbel's dramas on the stage, by quoting some more general statements from *The Literary Echo*.⁹ In the year 1911-12, Hebbel's dramas occupied over four hundred evenings on German stages, putting him thus in the company of Lessing and Grillparzer. This was an increase over the preceding year. "*Mary Magdalene* fell, to be sure, from 76 to 74, the *Nibelungen* held its own, while *Gyges* increased from 78 to 96." To give a standard for these figures, it may be said that Schiller, as second among all authors, had 1420 evenings, and Shakespeare, as fourth, had 1044. *William Tell* was given 329 times, the *Merchant of Venice* 147. Hebbel's share in the classical repertoire of his country is, therefore, modest but seemingly assured.

⁸ Lit. Echo, 10 Jahrgang, 1486, Note.

⁹ 15 Jahrgang, 949-50, based on the Bühnenspielplan for 1911-12.

CHAPTER XVI

CONCLUSION

IN October, 1861, Hebbel was in Hamburg for the purpose of selling the *Nibelungen* to Campe and arranging in a preliminary way for the publication of his complete works. Among the letters he wrote home to his wife one contains the description of a visit paid to his brother Johann, who was living in a little village near the town of Rendsburg in Holstein. The poet, who expected at first to find his brother in the town itself, discovered that he had moved out the distance of an hour's walk. An old woman showed him the direction, and he walked along the sandy road between the lonely fields, as he says, like his own heath-lad, with cows grazing on either side of him. Near a little wood he found the right village and a ploughman pointed out to him the house he sought. In front of the door an oldish looking man was cutting wood. His face was weather-beaten and well covered with beard. It took a moment for the two brothers to recognize each other, as this was their first meeting in twenty years. But when the poet held out his hand and called his brother by name, Johann let his axe fall, struck upon his knees, ran his hands through his hair, and burst into convulsive laughter—all signs of joyous surprise, to which the poet himself was often subject. Johann led his brother into the house. His wife was a peasant woman, who took things quietly. These two were living about on the same level as the poet's parents had lived back in Wesselburen, though Johann insisted it was better. Little Conrad, blue-eyed and pretty but very shy, came in presently with bread, and they drank coffee (chickory) together, while the neighbor's children peeped in at the door and windows. Under the stove were piled the only potatoes the family possessed, their chief means of subsistence. They never ate meat. During the conversation brother and wife got into

an argument as to whether they should buy wood or potatoes with their next bit of money. The poet settled this question on the spot, we may well imagine how! For special entertainment Johann blew on the wooden cuckoo which Hebbel's little girl had sent to Conrad some time before, and they all went out to see the two goats that furnished the family with milk. Johann, after shaving and cutting his hair, went back as far as Rendsburg with his brother, where they had something to eat and drink at an inn. On the way he confided that he had married his wife without ever seeing her beforehand, in order to escape military service. He was particularly anxious to know whether he did not live a little better than his father. He took his famous brother to visit a friend, as that would help his own credit, and seeing a torn silk handkerchief among the poet's belongings he asked for it, so that he might say: "This was his worst!"

Hebbel was deeply moved by this visit, and as he turned his back on his native country forever no more vivid reminder could have been given him of the conditions he had left and the distance he had traveled. He had entrusted himself with courage to the guidance of his talent. Year after year he had faced the bitter possibility of failure but at last he had reached a worthy goal. Perhaps his greatest struggle had been to resign the even greater success he saw almost within his grasp. Life, he used to say to his young friends, cannot be taken simply enough. "I came to peace only through resignation and learned to look upon my coffin as my bed."¹ And this resignation was never complete.

Having already anticipated much of what made up Hebbel's life to the end, and briefly followed his literary fate beyond that, it now remains for us to sum up the principal biographical facts of his last few years. Among his bitterest experiences in these years was the breach of friendship between himself and his truest disciple, Emil Kuh. The poet contrasted his fate on this occasion with that of Timon of Athens, who was betrayed by those on whom he had lavished material wealth. He, on the other hand, had been betrayed

¹ To *Engländer*, Jan. 1, 1860.

by a man on whom he had lavished all the wealth of his spirit. His bitterness and suffering knew no bounds, and for a time he was seriously ill because of them. Yet he was himself in large part responsible, having carried his domination to the point where Kuh was no longer able to endure it. For the same reason he was deserted by Debrois van Bruyck. Shortly before this unfortunate event Hebbel had definitely broken off relations with Gutzkow because the latter had abused Kuh in his presence (end of 1859). Though he never overcame his friend's "desertion," he found a measure of solace in the larger circle of acquaintances that had gradually gathered around him. These were no longer young men, as in the beginning of his residence in Vienna, but persons of mature mind, from all circles of life and of assured standing in the world. There were so many of these that Hebbel was compelled to form twelve circles of about twelve each, inviting one circle at a time, and entertaining those together who were the most congenial. He was justly proud of being the center of so distinguished a group, mindful as he was of his own humble origin. He was fond of conversation, his own thoughts becoming clearer to him in the process. When he read from his works in these gatherings he was exceedingly sensitive to any interruption.

The popularity that Hebbel had hoped each of his works in turn might bring him seemed at last to come in some measure with his *Nibelungen*. It was Dingelstedt who sponsored this work. The first two parts were successfully given in Weimar, January, 1861. In May of that year, the whole trilogy was presented on the same stage. It was with great difficulty, in fact only after a personal appeal from the Grand Duke to the Austrian Emperor, that Christine obtained a leave of absence from the Burgtheater in order to share in the performance. Dingelstedt, knowing that Hebbel and his wife were not satisfied in Vienna, proposed that they come to Weimar. The Grand Duke and Duchess were in every way favorable to this arrangement, the latter even guaranteeing a pension from her private purse should the theater be unable to grant it. The two guests were treated with every mark of distinction and returned to

Vienna with the expectation that Weimar would be their future home. This expectation, however, was not realized, because, it was said, of Dingelstedt's jealousy cropping out at last. Dingelstedt denied this charge after Hebbel's death, and assigned the poet's dislike of a small town as the real reason for the failure of the plan. There may be some truth in this. Hebbel's first impression of Weimar was stated in the pithy sentence: "In Weimar one should be either Goethe—or his secretary." On the other hand we know that the Grand Duchess herself warned Hebbel of Dingelstedt, whom she declared to be *un caractère abominable*. And very opportunely, too, Dingelstedt managed to install Gutzkow, with whom Hebbel was on poor terms, in an important position in the little literary capital, where there was no room to avoid one's enemies. But whatever Dingelstedt may have done in this matter, the value of his services to Hebbel remains unshaken and Hebbel never forgot it. Vienna, on the other hand, now seemed willing to make some reparation for past neglect. Laube was constrained to give the first two parts of the *Nibelungen*, and the whole episode ended in a wholesome growth of Hebbel's fame.

Hebbel's interest in public affairs was reflected in a long poem he wrote in the summer of 1861, on occasion of the attempt made by a student to assassinate the king of Prussia. A similar attempt made upon the life of the Austrian emperor eight years before had also been used by him as an opportunity for an important utterance. The position taken in both of these poems was, that the monarch had been spared in order to accomplish the great purpose of uniting all Germany under one leadership. Then it had been Austria, now it was Prussia. Hebbel particularly emphasized the necessity of a united Germany if German civilization was not to perish as Roman civilization had perished. He had in a measure turned away from Austria in disappointment. He was now doomed to the additional disappointment that no notice was taken of his new warning by those in power. So much the more notice of it was taken by the slavish portions of Austro-Hungary, to whom he referred in the poem as the "menial nations." By this he merely meant that they had

not yet attained any world-leadership. A storm of protest was raised by the expression, the whole episode ending, as Hebbel said, by Czechs and Poles abusing one another in the restaurants in terms of his poem. While this was a self-imposed public task, he was officially chosen to write the *Prologue* for the ceremonies attending the adoption of the Austrian Constitution (February, 1862). To be sure, three poets had refused before he was asked, but he did not discover that until twelve months later.

In the summer of 1862, Hebbel, true to his old habit, set out on another journey. At the instance of Marshall, an Englishman by birth and the secretary of the Grand Duchess of Weimar, he decided to visit London. In that city he also had the great pleasure of renewing his acquaintance with Engländer, who was living there. Marshall and Engländer showed him the city, which seemed to him like a huge leviathan. Like Grillparzer, he was chiefly impressed with the sturdy character of the people, their respect for themselves and their laws, in general with what he termed their healthy egotism. To Hebbel also the English Sunday seemed a strange institution.

In August of that summer the poet was invited to Wilhelmstal by the Grand Duchess of Weimar, where he spent pleasant days with an intimate circle of friends, among whom were Marshall and Adolf Schöll. The latter in his *Recollections of Friedrich Hebbel* has given us a vivid impression of the poet's bearing under the conditions. He was perfectly natural and at his ease, a charming companion, without any inclination to distinguish himself in conversation or in any other way. Thus he responded to the delicate tactfulness of his hostess. He had now probably mastered those mysterious forms, the lack of which had once caused him such bitter moments. He still retained a severe formality when he desired to stand on his dignity. An amusing note to Laube is preserved, which is signed by Doctor Friedrich Hebbel, followed by his orders with their classes in detail. He was fond of wearing the red ribbon of the Weimar Order of the Falcon, and he had made for certain occasions some cards on which, in addition to his

name, appeared the words, *Chevalier de plusieurs ordres*—to the ridicule of his enemies.

Hebbel was taken away from life at the very height of his powers, his happiness, and his fame. The success of his *Nibelungen* in the Burgtheater had made him the literary man of the day. The University students especially vied with one another in showing him honor. His home life was all that he desired. He knew how to enjoy, as they came, the simple pleasures of domestic life, how to be a companion to his wife and romp with his child. He had once expressed the wish that he might work to the last and perish in the fire of the last poem. This too was granted him. On his deathbed he was busy with *Demetrius*. The malady with which he suffered is rare in men, a gradual softening of the bones. At various times he had been subject to severe attacks of rheumatic pain, a particularly bad spell falling, for example, in the summer of 1859. These attacks overtook him with violence in 1863, refusing to yield to medical treatment when he went for his usual rest in Gmunden, and after that to Baden for the baths. During the last months his suffering was intense. He carried poison on his person with the idea that it might be necessary for him to put an end to his suffering. The closing weeks of his life were spent in bed.

To Hebbel's great joy Emil Kuh came to see him at the end, and their reconciliation was among his last happy moments. One month before he died he heard that his *Nibelungen* had received the Schiller prize. That is human fate, he said—either we lack the cup or we lack the wine. He died on December 13, 1863, the immediate cause being pneumonia. He was buried two days later at the Matzleinsdorfer cemetery. His body was borne to rest by students from the University, and accompanied by a great crowd, in spite of the pouring rain.

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The following titles are referred to the page (P.) and line (l.) of this book.

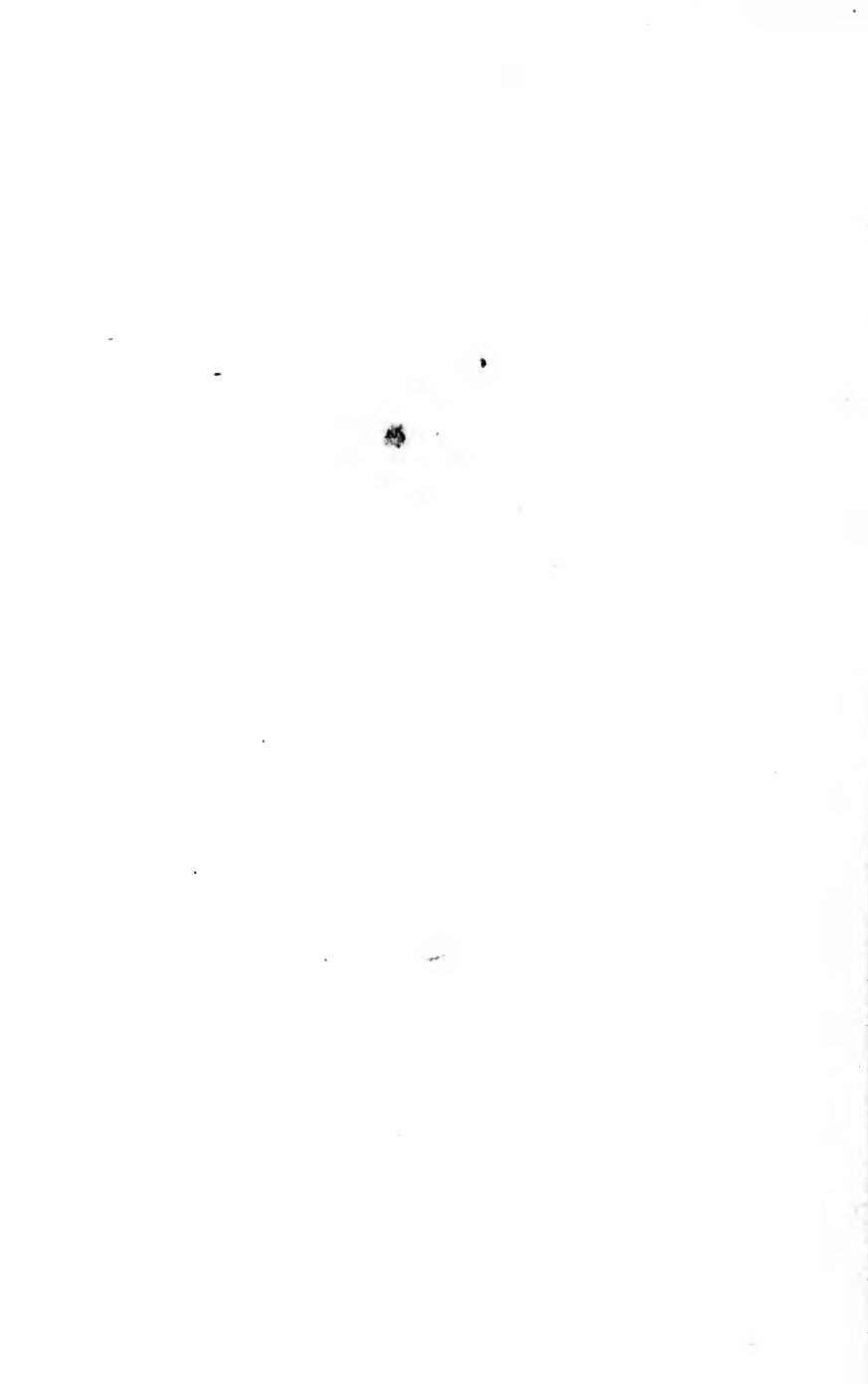
- P. 17, 1. 8: See *Friedrich Hebbels Philosophische Jugendlyrik*, von Dr. Paul Zincke, 1908; *Studien zu Hebbels Jugendlyrik*, von Johannes Maria Fischer, 1910. The view that Schelling influenced Hebbel's early poetry, as advanced by Dr. Alfred Neumann (Aus Friedrich Hebbels *Werdezeit*, 1899) and widely accepted, seems to me untenable after Zincke's work.
- P. 18, 1. 1: Fischer (op. cit. under P. 17), p. 22.
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- P. 54, 1. 39: For a general discussion of Hebbel's attitude to woman, see Mrs. Clara Newport, *Woman in the Thought and Work of Friedrich Hebbel*, Madison, Wis., 1912.
- P. 57, 1. 9: Meyer-Benfey (op. cit. under P. 50), p. 161.

- P. 59, 1. 1: See Karl Zeiss, *Hebbel und Nietzsche*, Beilage zur Allgemeinen Zeitung, Nr. 212, 1900. Also Hebbel's *Werke* I., p. 413. The Hamburg version was worked out independently by Hebbel.
- P. 59, 1. 8: Hebbel-Kalender (op. cit. under P. 21), pp. 214, 218.
- P. 59, 1. 16: Review by E. Meyen, Halle Jahrbücher, August, 1840. Reprinted by Wütschke, *Hebbel in der zeitgenössischen Kritik*, Berlin, 1910.
- P. 59, 1. 20: See Hebbel-Kalender (op. cit. under P. 21).
- P. 62, 1. 4: See Ludwig Levin, *Beitrag zu einem Psychogram*, 1913, p. 33.
- P. 64, 1. 20: For these statements and the analysis following see the excellent essay by Richard Meszlény: *Friedrich Hebbels Genoveva*, Hebbelforschungen 4, Berlin, 1910.
- P. 70, 1.15: Op. cit. (under P. 64), p. 140 f.
- P. 75, 1. 16: *Westermanns Jahrbuch der Illustrierten Deutschen Monatshefte*. Oktober, 1857—März, 1858. Reprinted in Wütschke (op. cit. under P. 59), No. 28, as probably by Emil Kuh.
- P. 75, 1. 35: See also Fischer, *Vorbilder, Theorie und Rhythmus von Hebbels Jugendlyrik*, 1910.
- P. 75, 1. 37: Op. cit. under P. 17.
- P. 76, 1. 9: *Der junge Hebbel, Weltanschauungen und früheste Jugendwerke, unter Berücksichtigung des späteren Systems und der durchgehenden Ansichten*, 1908.
- P. 77, 1. 33: Op. cit. (under P. 76), p. 173 and note.
- P. 83, 1. 36: See No. 203 in Wütschke (op. cit. under P. 59).
- P. 94, 1. 29: See Eloesser, *Das bürgerliche Drama*, Berlin, 1898, p. 194 f.
- P. 110, 1. 27: *Der Pantragismus als System der Weltanschauung und Aesthetik Friedrich Hebbels*, dargestellt von Arno Scheunert, Hamburg und Leipzig, 1903, p. 43 f.
- P. 111, 1. 2: Op. cit. (under P. 110), pp. 70-71.
- P. 113, 1. 38: See Wilhelm Waetzoldt, *Hebbel und die Philosophie seiner Zeit*, 1903, p. 39 f. The expression Hebbel uses is *Berechtigung der Idee*. He first wrote *Beschaffenheit der Idee*, but changed it. See the critical note in the *Werke*. For traces in his thought of this evolutionary conception prior to his stay in Paris, see esp. O. Walzel, *Friedrich Hebbel und seine Dramen*, Berlin, 1913, p. 46 f.
- P. 114, 1, 25: The following account is based largely on Wilhelm Waetzoldt (op. cit. under P. 113), O. F. Walzel,

- Hebbelprobleme*, Leipzig, 1909; Elise Dosenheimer, *Friedrich Hebbels Auffassung vom Staat und sein Trauerspiel Agnes Bernauer*, Leipzig, 1912; A. Kutscher, *Friedrich Hebbel als Kritiker des Dramas*, Berlin, 1907; Dr. Paul Zincke, op. cit. under P. 17.
- P. 115, 1. 18: Alfred Neumann, in an article entitled *Aus Friedrich Hebbels Werkezeit*, first advocated this view, which found wide acceptance.
- P. 116, 1. 10: Dosenheimer, op. cit. (under P. 114), p. 153.
- P. 116, 1. 34: Dosenheimer, op. cit. (under P. 114), p. 182. Also for this paragraph, *ibid.*, p. 181, and Waetzoldt, op. cit. (under P. 114), pp. 28, 31-33.
- P. 117, 1. 29: Kutscher, op. cit. (under P. 114), p. 180.
- P. 118, 1. 32: Scheunert, op. cit. (under P. 110), p. 329, in criticism of Johannes Krumm: *Hebbel, der Genius*.
- P. 118, 1. 34: Scheunert, op. cit. (under P. 110), p. 219.
- P. 119, 1. 6: Walzel, op. cit. (under P. 114), p. 44.
- P. 119, 1. 8: *Zu Hebbels Anschauungen über Kunst und künstlerisches Schaffen*, *Archiv für systematische Philosophie*, 13, 242 f.
- P. 124, 1. 19: Hebbel-Kalender (op. cit. under P. 21), p. 197 f.
- P. 131, 1. 10: Hebbel-Kalender (op. cit. under P. 21), p. 173 f.
- P. 144, 1. 21: *Das Burgtheater*, Chapter XX.
- P. 146, 1. 11: *Jahrbücher der Gegenwart*, Tübingen, 1847. Republished in *Altes und Neues, Neue Folge*, Stuttgart, 1889.
- P. 153, 1. 25: *Friedrich Hebbels Briefwechsel mit Freunden und berühmten Zeitgenossen*. Hrsg. von Felix Bamberg, Vol. II.
- P. 170, 1. 3: See also Bornstein, *Hebbels Herodes und Mariamne*, Hamburg und Leipzig, 1904.
- P. 176, 1. 9: *Hebbels Verhältnis zur Religion*, Joachim Frenkel, Berlin, 1907; Ernst Horneffer, *Hebbel und das religiöse Problem der Gegenwart*, Jena, 1907; and esp. Otto Frommel, *Neuere deutsche Dichter in ihrer religiösen Stellung*, 1902.
- P. 181, 1. 38: A. Freiherr von Berger, *Meine Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, Wien, 1910.
- P. 182, 1. 9: *Heinrich Laubes Prinzip der Theaterleitung*, 1908.
- P. 182, 1. 22: A. von Weilen, *Jahrbuch der Shakespeare Gesellschaft*, Bd. 43.
- P. 182, 1. 24: Op. cit. (under P. 181), the chapter on Laube.
- P. 195, 1. 33: Dosenheimer, op. cit. (under P. 114), p. 25.

- P. 196, 1. 7: Dosenheimer, op. cit. (under P. 114), Chapter VIII.
- P. 211, 1. 6: A careful study of *Mutter und Kind* has been made by Fritz Enss, in a Marburg dissertation, 1909. My account of the work, however, is not based on this study in any particular respect.
- P. 216, 1. 1: For the whole subject see, Annina Periam: *Hebbel's Nibelungen, its sources, method and style*. The Columbia University Press, 1906.
- P. 220, 1. 14: Compare also, A. Schöll, *Meine Erinnerungen an Friedrich Hebbel*. Preussische Jahrbücher, Bd. 41, 1878.
- P. 222, 1. 8: For the following paragraphs, see Paul Bornstein, *Lit. Echo*, 10. Jahrgang, Heft 21-22, 1479-99. Also Kulke's *Erinnerungen an Friedrich Hebbel*.
- P. 222, 1. 24: For the various estimates of Hebbel's musical insight, see A. Stübing, *Friedrich Hebbels Dramen als Opern*, 1911, p. 4.
- P. 232, 1. 31: Two interesting essays on the subject mentioned in this paragraph are: *Die Tragödie Friedrich Hebbels. Ihre Stellung und Bedeutung in der Entwicklung des Dramas*. Von Johannes Krumm, Berlin, 1908; and *Hebbels Stellung zu Shakespeare*. Von Dr. Wilhelm Alberts. Berlin, 1908.
- P. 234, 1. 11: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Leipzig, 1891. 5. Bd., p. 358.
- P. 237, 1. 39: An extended comparison between Hebbel and Ibsen has been made by Professor Joseph Wiehr: *Hebbel und Ibsen in ihren Anschauungen verglichen*. Stuttgart, 1908. My summary is based largely on his work.
- P. 238, 1. 39: For Hebbel's language I have consulted chiefly the following special studies: *Stilistische Studien zu Hebbels Tragödien*, Heinrich Deiters, Berlin, 1911; *Hebbels Stil in seinen ersten Tragödien—Judith und Genoveva*, Edgar Wallberg, Berlin, 1909; *Studien zu Hebbels Wortwahl*, P. Knutzen, 1912; *Das Drama Friedrich Hebbels*, Albert Malte Wagner, Hamburg und Leipzig, 1911 (This also for dramatic style); Meszlèny, op. cit. under P. 64.
- P. 239, 1. 33: Knutzen, op. cit. under P. 238.
- P. 240, 1. 3: Wallberg, op. cit. under P. 238.
- P. 240, 1. 11: For a detailed analysis of his lyric poetry from this point of view, see Albert Edward Gubelmann: *Studies in the Lyric Poems of Friedrich Hebbel*. Yale University Press, 1912.

- P. 240, 1. 33: Meszlény, op. cit. (under P. 64), pp. 152-160.
- P. 240, 1. 37: For this paragraph, see Wagner and Wallberg, op. cit. under P. 238.
- P. 243, 1. 3: A discussion of this subject may be found in Eugen Tannenbaum's *Friedrich Hebbel und das Theater*. Berlin, 1914.
- P. 244, 1. 34: Hebbel-Kalender (Vid. under P. 21), p. 232.



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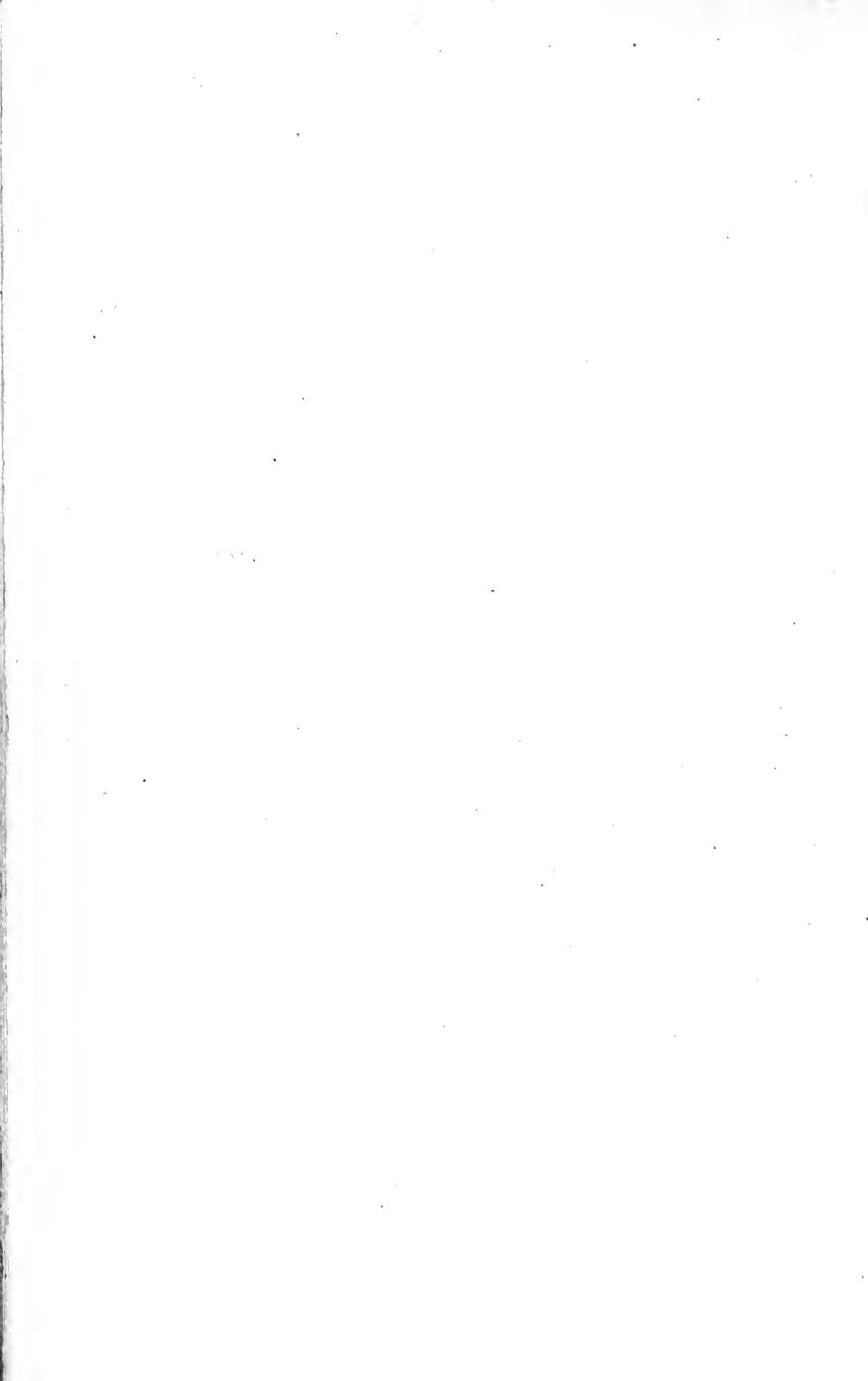
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